SCIENCE STORIES

DECEMBER, 1953
35¢

POTENTIAL ZERO

By John Bloodstone

S. J. Byrne, T. P. Cameron, Mack Reynolds, Edmund Wallace, Richard Dorot

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The People Who Write SCIENCE STORIES

EDWARD WELLEN

DO YOU remember your high school yearbook? Something (such as writing this) stirs you into hunting it up. You puff the dust off the covers and thumb through the pages. Faces look up at you, some dimly, some vividly evoking. War has struck down some of the finest; you've lost touch with most of the remaining. Then you see yourself.

Aside from the shock of realizing what you and time have done to each other, there, in print, is the testament of your hopes. What did you say then that you wanted to be now? My New Rochelle High School yearbook reports, "It is his ambition to become a writer." That was true in 1937. It is still true at 33. (The typically graphic ambition of the class wit was to be a mailman delivering letters to a nudist colony. I wonder if he ever got to drop off a letter?)

Why do I write? *(Editors' note.* Sorry, Herr Professor, but because of a space warp we have to delete that long psychoanalytic reply. Be brief and breezy. You heard us, Professor. *Nein!)*

I figure alphabet soup went to my noodle. *(Author's note.* There's my substitute answer, then.)

My earliest job took the right form: I was a newsboy. But there the Horatio Alger plot blew a fuse. After finishing high school I worked for a fuel company as, successively, mechanic's helper, stockroom clerk, degree day computer, dispatcher. In the Chemical Warfare Service during World War II, I was a groundling in the North African, Mediterranean, and European theaters.

After the war I listened for opportunity's lukewarm knock: I

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SCIENCE STORIES

Issue No. 2

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Editorial

THIS is the second issue of SCIENCE STORIES. The first issue was tossed in your lap with little or no ceremony, and even less explanation. For a variety of reasons—and let's be honest, most of them were financial—we had to make a spur-of-the-moment decision to discontinue OTHER WORLDS and replace it with the magazine you are now reading. We phoned the typesetter, halted work on the August OW, and lifted the editorial and stories we needed for SCIENCE STORIES No. 1 bodily from OW material on hand. This is why the first issue editorial didn't let you in on all the changes taking place. Now, with issue No. 1 going on sale in a few days, and issue No. 2 well under way we're taking time to make a few explanations.

We've been receiving letters about issue No. 1 from our subscribers (they get the magazine quite a bit in advance of you people why buy from the newsstands) and we're swamped with questions and comments. Most frequently asked is "where are the missing 32 pages and the back cover painting?" The answer to that one is easy—just look around you and note how many magazines are cutting the number of pages, using cheaper paper, dropping color illustrations, changing frequently from monthly to bi-monthly or quarterly, or even folding altogether! We had a choice of cutting production costs or suspending publication, which isn't much of a choice, if you ask us. I think we regret losing these pages and dropping the back cover paintings as much as you readers do, and we'll tell you here and now that as soon as we're financially able, we'll lose no time in bringing them back!

Another question concerned the various features we use in OW: editorial, letters, personals, etc. We'd like to be able to continue these in SCIENCE STORIES, but in all fairness to the general readership we feel that we should devote as much space as possible to actual stories. We'll continue the editorial, and when space permits we'll run your letters or excerpts from them; but most of the space will be used for fiction. Again, as soon as possible we'll increase the number of pages and bring back these features.

What happens to your subscription now that OW's discontinued and SCIENCE STORIES is a bi-monthly? You'll receive the remaining copies due you in UNIVERSE (more about this magazine later) and SCIENCE STORIES;

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and if you like one of the magazines best, drop us a card and we'll send you copies of that magazine only. When it's time to renew, you can re-subscribe to either or both of these.

In addition to SCIENCE STORIES, we are bringing out a new magazine called MYSTIC. It's not science-fiction, but you may be interested in it since it contains stories of the fantasy and occult classification, written by some of your favorite science-fiction authors — Rog Phillips, Hal Annas, Randall Garrett, and Chester Geier, to name a few. J. Allen St. John painted the cover for the first issue, and the interior illustrations are by John Grossman, Malcolm Smith and Lawrence. MYSTIC goes on sale September 15, so why not pick up a copy and see how you like it.

As for UNIVERSE, we've purchased half of it from Bell Publishing Co. (you'll see the names of Palmer and Mahaffey on the contents page of the third issue) which explains why you'll be receiving it as part of your OW subscription.

There you have it—we had to discontinue OW, but we're bringing you two science-fiction magazines and one fantasy/occult magazine. All are bi-monthly, 128 pages, 35c, and — most important — will contain top quality stories and art work. We hope you like them. If you do, we're happy; if you don't, write and tell us why—maybe we can make some changes to improve them.

You've heard, of course, of the guy who always hedges his bets, and the guy who prepares an alibi in case he's wrong in any move or statement he is making? Some people call it caution. Like the guy who said the White Sox would win two on Sunday, then when they lost, said he hadn't said *which* Sunday. We're like that spineless creature. Always passing the buck. But right now we're going to do a little crowing about our hard luck. All you readers who scoffed at The Man From Tomorrow, our little experiment in foretelling the future, please note that we predicted the demise of OTHER WORLDS! And believe us, we had not the slightest hint that it would come true, in fact, we were very cocky about what good editors we were, and how solidly we were placed in the science-fiction world. That magazine slump sure hit us! So, you have the spectacle of the fox, who, not being able to reach the grapes, said they would be sour anyway. We have the sour grapes, but we are pretending they were sweet because we're prophets!

How's that for going a long way down the pike to find a happy ending?

But no kidding, we're beginning to be happy about our new ventures — like kids with new toys. What's money, anyway! — *Rap.*

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The Vanyans came from outer space bringing Earthmen invaluable gifts, and Earth received them—and their gifts—with open arms. But what was behind it all? What would the Vanyans ask in payment? With these questions came fear . . . and distrust . . . and hatred.

By John Bloodstone

POTENTIAL ZERO

Illustrated by Virgil Finlay

YOU rise up to accuse me of being traitor to my kind—I, who merely sought to save the life of one immortal creature. I, who lived in the Vanyan city and knew those golden, benevolent god people, knew the untranslatable intricacies and stimulating ideation patterns of their language and understood the inimitable design of their architecture, the purpose of their way of life and the vital magnitude and scope of their philosophy. It is I who stand before the world accused of treason, to be judged by you who used the gift of gods to turn upon your benefactors and destroy them without warning, like so many superstitious savages, like raving witch-burners and blood-thirsty assassins—murderers of Angels, destroyers of Utopia, desecrators of Justice, enemies of Mercy, traitors to Gratitude!

The court-martial that will decide my guilt or innocence in this matter is insignificant here in the light of eternal values—a dried leaf that must fall from the tree of Time and be lost in the dust under the feet of those myriad generations which must recover from the far greater crime which YOU have committed against them and the tarnished name of Man.

You ask me for my story. You condescend to give me the privilege of speaking my piece. And I say it is your guilt complex that bends you to this decision, an awareness of a basic meanness in the nature of Man with which you will have to live. Nor do I pity you for it. It is the law of retribution. . . .

"Ye gods!" ejaculated the President, looking up from the manuscript. "This fellow should have written my campaign speeches!"

"You can see why it would be inadvisable to release his story to the Press," commented his secretary.

"But what am I to do? The

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"I dreamed of Kria . . . saw her running toward me across an endless plain."

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people want his story before he is court-martialed. And there's the big problem. One man—the only man who really learned the Vanyan's language and understood them—could turn the tables on us and the United Nations. If we allow his story to come out before the trial—and if he managed to throw world sympathy toward himself and the Vanyans—we could not convict him of treason and carry out the execution without becoming guilty of the crime he's screaming about . . ."

"And yet on the other hand, sir, if you court-martial him without letting him tell his story publicly you know what that will mean. . . ."

The President supported his forehead in his hand, shook his head.

"Sir, do you think you have committed an historial blunder?"

The Chief Executive looked up, startled, suddenly on the defensive. "You mean—in having destroyed the Vanyans? Not a bit of it!" He looked beyond the secretary to make sure the door was closed. Then he smiled a secret and confidential smile. "Come on, Henry—where's your political think-cap? They arrived in an election year. What they pretended to stand for would have ruined the whole Party platform. Why—if we had played along with them the people would have been ready for World Federation in another year!"

The secretary sighed. "I suppose you're right. But you're getting a terrific reaction to this Ray Sanders situation." He indicated a mountain of telegrams and urgent memos from congressmen and senators. "Something has to be done."

One of the President's phones rang and the secretary picked up the receiver. He said, "Yes, that's right." Then he listened, and suddenly his haggard face lighted with enthusiasm. "That's marvelous!" he exclaimed into the phone. "Keep this under a lid till it's okayed for release. . . ."

"What is it, Henry?" asked the President, hopefully curious.

"It's about Ray Sanders' lady love—you know who. . . ."

"Oh, you mean the Vanyan woman. I wonder if Sanders is bitter about what we did to the Vanyans or what we did to *her*—what is that beauty's name?"

"Kria, sir."

"Kria—that's it. She's the only Vanyan left alive. What's the news? Is she finally going to die?"

"Not even the doctors are sure of that. Her blood looks like blood, but it isn't. Her pulse is not a pulse, merely a pressure. With all those bullets in her—"

"Well good God! Haven't they taken an X-ray *yet!* Ever since the Vanyans arrived it has been the major objective of our Secret Service to obtain an X-ray of a Vanyan. Now here we have this woman at our disposal—"

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"That's just it, sir. They have taken a complete set of X-rays. . . ."

The President tensed, impaling his secretary with a glare. "And?"

"She is strictly *not* human!"

"Not human! A gorgeous woman like that? But—if she's not human, what *is* she?"

The secretary smiled, shaking his head. "You might not believe me if I told you. Don't take my word for it. Call Rear Admiral Herndon in Navy Medicine and Surgery. But here's the point, sir—" The secretary interrupted the President as he was about to reach for the phone. "I think I've found my political think-cap, after all. This is the break you've been looking for. Don't tell Ray Sanders the truth about his extra-terrestrial wife. Release his story. Then bring the real truth up at the court-martial. She's inhuman. Let the Press take up the monster angle from there—and then see where world sympathy goes. It's basic human nature to distrust and fear the Unknown. . . ."

The President compressed his lips in an expression of sudden decision. "Henry," he said, picking up the phone, "if what you say is true—"

The secretary shrugged, indicating the phone, and the President put in a personal call to the Navy hospital. His conversation with the rear admiral in charge of the Department of Medicine and Surgery consisted mostly of exclamations punctuating long periods of wide-eyed listening.

"But—" he almost spluttered, "that's more incredible than the Vanyan visitation, itself!" He stared, aghast, as he listened to the admiral. "If you told me she was a robot, it couldn't be more—What? Well of course that's a form of life, in a way. I danced with her at the first reception ball. I've shaken hands with many a Vanyan. I'd say they're vibrantly alive—or *were*—but I didn't think of *that kind* of being alive. . . . How could a species like that ever evolve? In fact, how does that Vanyan woman— She *doesn't!* But I mean, how would she— She *wouldn't!* Well then how the hell—"

When he finally put down the receiver, he looked up at his secretary in open-mouthed amazement. "Where in ten thousand hells did such a race come from?" he asked. "And they looked exactly like humans—even more so!"

"Is that important now, sir? They've been destroyed."

"Do you suppose that Ray Sanders knows the truth—about his Vanyan wife—what she really is?"

Despite himself, the secretary colored slightly about his ears. "Well— I understand she was a flawless facsimile—or still is. And she's no robot. She's a form of sentient life, with more personality than human women. How could any man tell? I know Sanders doesn't realize what she is. Would he have married her if he knew

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the truth? This is going to be *news* for him. . . ."

"I wonder what purpose she had in deceiving him. After all, there could be no procreation—"

"Again, sir, what does that matter? This is an ace up your sleeve."

The Chief Executive's sleepless eyes and tired mouth crinkled into a brittle smile of triumph. He pointed at the thin manuscript before him. "This is just Ray Sanders' preamble," he said. "You tell the Secretary of Defense I am authorizing a full release of Sanders' story—and confidentially, tell him why. We want Sanders to blab his heart out!"

The two men looked at each other and laughed. It was another political triumph for their side. . . .

RAY SANDERS heard the distant clamor in the streets outside his prison before he knew what had happened. He thought he heard newsboys shouting. Then he heard streetcars jangling their bells, and a persistent bedlam of automobile horns. He could not know at that moment that there were traffic jams all over the country caused by people stopping to buy extras and to read the papers right in the middle of the street. Or that business had come to a standstill to discuss him.

He merely sat on the edge of his bunk and looked through some of the letters that people had sent him. He had bundles of such letters beside him, unopened—and he did not intend to open them. The warden had mailsacks full of correspondence for him that he would never see.

Most of the letters started out like the one he had just read:

Dear Mr. Sanders:

Our organization represents a world-wide affiliation of civic groups who are vitally interested in the Vanyan form of government. We must apologize for approaching you at this time, but we feel that now is the only time to hope to hear from you regarding your personal views and opinions on the subject. . . .

Then there were the letters and telegrams from publishers and news syndicates:

UNIVERSAL PRESS WILL PAY YOU TWENTY-FIVE THOUSAND DOLLARS FOR EXCLUSIVE SYNDICATE RIGHTS—

Or from the people who really considered him to be a traitor:

Sir:

The Patriotic League of Delbrook, Arkansas, wishes to go on record as being in full accord with the Government of the United States and the United Nations in relation to your indictment for treason against humanity—

And then there was that other kind he was reading now, which disgusted him the most:

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Derest lover boy

Plese dont worry ul get out and wen you do I hope ul come and see me—

Sanders got up and began to pace the floor of his cell. He noticed that he had an unlighted cigarette in his mouth and he threw it violently into a corner. Then he paused, listening to a sudden commotion in the corridor.

"Hey Sanders!" yelled a scrubby-bearded prisoner across from him. "Here comes your public!"

Sanders went to the bars, grasped the cold steel in his big hands, and glared at the crowd of people bearing down on him. There was Warden Baker, trying to keep ahead of them, his eyes bloodshot from lack of sleep. Next to him was some sort of government official, and on the other side two men in Army brass. Behind came eager men and women waving notebooks and cameras. This, ostensibly, was the Press.

He tensed, angered. *Now* they were all so friendly and interested. He was a shining new martyr, the only ghost to represent those thousands of benevolent Vanyans who lay dead and dismembered in the rubble of their wonder city. These were the gibbering idiots who had permitted the United Nations to destroy the benefactors of Mankind. These people were behind the cold-blooded shooting of Kria.

They could all go straight to Hell!

"Sanders!" cried one reporter. "You can tell your story now! —not just to the authorities. You can tell it to the world!"

"You people will have to be quiet," interrupted Warden Baker. "Sanders, this is Mister George Hackman. He represents the President of the United States. This gentleman is the Provost Marshal, and this is Colonel Bigsby, representing the Secretary of Defense—Public Relations. They want to talk to you."

"I guess I'll have to listen," retorted Sanders. "I haven't any other place to go."

The President's special agent looked the prisoner over. He saw a tall, gaunt man with reddish brown hair and bushy, forward-jutting brows, underneath which were a pair of dark brown eyes that had become shadowed, somehow, by the things they had seen far beyond the skies of Earth. He also discerned a curious admixture of opposing types—a compromise between the rugged adventurer and the sensitive dreamer and scholar. Beneath a not too acquiline nose was a wide mouth that had tightened into an expression of contempt, bitterness, disillusionment, torment and hate.

"Sanders," he said, "the President of the United States has authorized you to tell your story to the Press, as you see fit, before you are court-martialed. Do you wish to take advantage of this privilege?"

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Sanders sneered. "It's a great privilege, to be able to talk *after* the damage has been done! You can take your privilege and—"

"Just a minute!" interrupted another reporter. "If you tell your story they'll let you see Kria again."

Warden Baker roared. "I said you folks would have to be quiet and wait your turn!"

They were quiet then, because they were watching their victim's face. They had him, emotionally, where they wanted him. Two flashbulbs popped. And they all waited.

"This *is* quite officially authorized," said Colonel Bigsby.

Sanders glared at him and saw an elderly warhorse with Lord Calvert gray at the temples and a highball tan.

"We are here to corroborate the statement made by the President's agent."

Sanders clutched at the bars and glared out at all of them. He looked the colonel up and down, his lips tightening. The crowd could see the tension mounting in him like an earthquake.

"What would be the use!" he finally blurted out. More flashbulbs went off. "Even if my story got me acquitted? What would be the use! Do you think I give a damn about living in a world inhabited by idiots? You had Utopia handed to you on a golden platter and you sliced the throats of your benefactors! Why? Did they threaten you with invasion?"

"Look!" said the colonel. "We can understand, in part, how you feel about what happened. But what you do not seem to be able to grasp is that we could take no chances. And living next door to a superman civilization like that was taking too big a chance. . . ."

"So you used the very technology they gave you and massacred them!" yelled Sanders. More flashbulbs.

"Another thing you seem to forget," put in the Provost Marshal, who looked more like a shore-bound admiral, "is that you were a citizen of the United States of America when you warned the Vanyans about our attack. You endangered your own world. That makes you a traitor, Sanders. I'd get down off that martyr's pedestal if I were you."

"May I speak a moment, Warden?"

A distinguished looking, elderly reporter from the New York *Times* stepped forward wearing a powder blue suit, a pink boutonniere and a pocketful of slim, expensive cigars. When the warden looked at the government men and received a triple nod of approval he passed the nod along and the *Times* representative continued, addressing Sanders. "Whether you become acquitted or not," he said, "your story will be important to the world, especially in times to come. We cannot say here whether you are really right or wrong. The court-martial will have to decide

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that for the present. But let future generations judge you—and let them judge us. That is what will really count."

Sanders left the bars and paced his cell, brushing a hand through his hair. He thought of Kria, struggling against death in a hospital. And he thought of the times they had spent together on her own world. He had to see her again. . . .

"All right!" he said, suddenly. "I'll give you the story, but I'll write it myself. I'll give it all to you, in every detail. But don't come back and say I opened your eyes. Just remember one thing." He came back to the bars and glared at them. "When you realize the cataclysmic mistake you have made, you will have to live with the knowledge that now there is no remedy. You have obliterated the Vanyans. One golden chance in eternity, one ray of light out of space and time, never to return."

No flashbulbs now. Only silence, while they stared at him and he glared at them, his forehead beaded with cold perspiration. Prisoners along the cell block stood behind their bars and waited, watching and listening.

"It's too late for conscience," he continued. "You can't take back a barrage of atomic bombs and magnetic disintegration. I've seen the Vanyan city. I lived in it. I learned the language of the people you killed. I know what they stood for! There is only one conclusion you will be able to draw from my story. It is that *you* are the traitors, not against your country alone, but against humanity!"

Three days later, the world read Raymond Sanders' story.

YOU all know when they landed — August 17, 1956 — on the lawn of the Capitol Building, in Washington, D. C., shortly after eleven P.M., Eastern Standard Time. Three traditional flying saucers, complete with peripheral observation panels and the shallow dome on top.

They came smiling before the tanks and artillery and machine guns lined up to greet them, and they offered gifts. Their greatest gift was one of vital knowledge. Within one month, by means of sign language and mathematics, they proved that we were poisoning ourselves with mere practice blasts of atomic energy. Even the Russians agreed to universal control of atomic energy after that.

The Vanyan mission was one of peace. How could the world ever come to fear such a people when they offered Utopia and asked for nothing but good neighbors?

But you did come to fear and suspect, didn't you? And I know why now. It was instinctive egotism. Since we had all become accustomed to benevolence in the form of a false front behind which somebody was always paid off, it was perhaps a natural reaction in the beginning. Nobody could be

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that benevolent, you told yourselves. They wanted something. The whole thing was a trap.

But when time went on and the deception never revealed itself, you still could not accept pure benevolence at face value. You had to reduce the Vanyans to the level of your own understanding. The only way you could understand them was as a threat to your own existence. And so you destroyed them! But perhaps this was to be expected. Christ was crucified. . . .

By the end of that first day, many more discs had arrived, all over the world, and by the second day you all knew in general what the situation was. They had come from Mars but they were not Martians. Mars was the poor little oxygen-depleted world that astronomers always said it was. But the Vanyans had come to the solar system from interstellar space, searching for a new home, because their scientists had predicted that their own sun would soon become a nova. They had searched for centuries to find a suitable world, and at last they had found Earth—and Mars. Venus was still too hot and stormy. Earth was green and fair, but heavily populated. Mars possessed oxygen locked in a chemical state with its soil. Being benevolent and believing in fair play, the Vanyans did not come to Earth and tell us to make room for them, which they certainly could have done. Instead, they had set up machinery on Mars, developing a heavier gravitational field, building plants to release the oxygen again into the atmosphere and placing artificial sun satellites in orbits around the planet to give them the proper temperatures to support life as we and they knew it.

They had worked with Mars for fifteen years and established their own form of civilization there before they decided to establish contact with us. At first they investigated us without contact, in order to learn more about us, so the flying saucer reports of previous years turned out to have an actual basis in fact. When they became aware of our advances in the field of nuclear energy and finally saw us teetering on the brink of atomic war they knew they could wait no longer. So they landed and started negotiations.

After they had succeeded in freeing us from the fear of atomic warfare, tensions began to be relieved among the nations of the world regarding themselves—but a new tension was arising—a fear of the Vanyans. What was their real purpose and intent? What did they *really* want? You watched them and discussed them daily, and as time passed without their giving any basis for your fears this fact only served to heighten your suspicions more. The Vanyans were fiendishly clever!

They were small in number and great in science. They offered us

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technological knowledge in exchange for various useful materials and products we could give them. They readily instructed us how to overcome gravitation and build spaceships exactly equivalent to theirs. They even gave us their own weapons.

At first this latter move on their part was considered to be incredibly naïve, but then the doubters came forth again and said that such naïveté was wholly incompatible with such advanced mentalities. The Vanyans were accused of allowing us to build our own booby trap.

Yet they opened Mars to us and allowed us to come and go at will. They hid nothing from us and answered every question. Except one thing. They would not permit themselves to be X-rayed or carefully examined, physiologically. Since they were obviously flesh and blood humans, we wondered what they were hiding.

Just that one mystery fanned universal doubt and fear to overwhelming proportions. The Vanyans came to us offering a new era, but they reserved one little right to privacy—and for that they were sinister monsters masquerading in human form. Imagination ran riot. Superstitious dread mounted to the point of insanity. If a Vanyan smiled and held out a precious gift of knowledge to us, we would tremble inwardly, instinctively fearing to accept and thus contribute another choking strand to the imaginary web they were supposed to be weaving about us, inexorably, day by day and month by month.

In regard to my own reactions during those first weeks of wonder, I was more or less neutral, willing to give them the benefit of a doubt, searching through their deeds and their way of life for some wisdom lying beyond our comprehension which would in the final analysis explain the things they did that seemed irreconcilable with our own realities.

Then, in early September of that year just prior to the opening of the public schools, a group of Vanyans visited Los Angeles. . . .

THEY came in one of their saucers, as they had come to Washington and New York and Chicago, or to London, Paris and Moscow. They came happily, cheerfully, trustingly and without subterfuge—simply to learn what they could about us and enable us to get acquainted with them.

At first it was impossible to get a close look at them except on television, because it was worse than the Rose Parade or the Rose Bowl by far. I wanted to see them in the flesh, but milling crowds were anathema to me. I waited—and finally my opportunity came.

It came because of one outstanding difficulty, which was, of course, the vital matter of communication. In that one respect their arrival on Earth differed

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from wishful thinking. They were not telepathic, nor did they have any of those convenient machines that you fit on your head in order to get your languages translated automatically. Their language was extremely difficult and involved. Up to this time they had been indulging in a very rapidly developed and publicized system of sign language, in addition to mathematical symbology for expressing scientific concepts. But communication was slow, and they were vitally interested in solving this problem, as were we.

So it was that by the natural process of groping their way and making their wants understood they gravitated toward the institutes of learning and especially toward the teachers. For some reason which we were to understand at a later date, they treated teachers with an unusual amount of respect — even deference. Second only in popularity with them were the linguists, the first being of course the teachers of the physical sciences. And in a way this still had a lot to do with language. They could understand the language of science most readily, although art and music were also highly favored media for expression. But they recognized the fact that if they were to expand their concepts and understanding of us they would have to get down to the business of actual word ideation. And so, at last, the Vanyans and the local linguists got together—and I was included, as a fairly well recognized comparative philologist.

It was at the banquet given by the Alpha Phi Gamma, a national teachers' honorary society for philologists, that I first met Kria. Not all the visiting Vanyans were present, but we had three of them, which was enough to put us in the television spotlights during the whole evening—or at least up to that point when the evening was violently interrupted.

There was a bright young male Vanyan named Drganu who turned out to be Kria's brother, and there was an apparently young man of much graver bearing, named Sanal. We were not quite sure at the time what the Vanyan lifespan was, but I later found out that Sanal was over fifty Earth years old. He was the father of Kria and Drganu.

I wish that I were telling this story to someone who had not experienced the visitation of the Vanyans, because a description of their well know peculiarities would be of particular interest. I mean such things as, of course, their clothing, or lack of it, those hundred and one little differences in the sense of value, or etiquette, or morality, which were the result of a much different social system, and which more often than not resulted in considerable embarrassment on our part before we could make an adjustment to their ways.

For example an uninformed

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reader might be shocked to know that our three guests sat almost in the nude at our banquet, nor did any amount of sign language appear to influence them. They were not stubborn about it. They merely laughed the whole thing off and continued brightly with the intellectual pursuits at hand.

Not that their semi-nudity was repulsive to any of us. On the contrary. Like all Vanyans, our three guests were almost breath-takingly beautiful. Indeed, if we learned academicians had possessed one-half the physical attributes of our guests we might have considered relieving the tension by at least removing our shirts. These were a golden people, both inside and out. It was a tonic to associate with them. On their faces and in their eyes one could detect a great intelligence coupled with the enviable insouciance of a child.

To me a most satisfactory arrangement was the fact that I was seated at the table within only two places of where Kria was sitting. Before I became involved directly in the sign language and other meager forms of communication, I was perfectly content to study her, wearing an expression of purely academic interest but not feeling it in the least.

I do not wish to appear facetious, but I must say that I stopped thinking like a bachelor the moment I laid eyes on her. To say she was beautiful would be as vacuous an expression as to say that the sun shines. Her bluish hair was parted in back and done up in those thick braids that they slip under the double ringlets on their arms—a very practical method of getting it out of the way and yet very decorative. She wore a tiara of precious metal and sparkling jewels which had been fashioned into the likeness of living flowers. Her eyes were slightly more lavender than blue. Her brows were black and perfectly formed, and her lashes were thick and long, without mascara. I've seen women play with men with their eyes in an effort to express their sophistication and feminine prowess in general, but Kria played a breathtaking game with her eyes that was just exactly that. A happy, innocent game. But deep behind the game you could see what seemed to be mirrored vistas of interstellar space—something vast, terrifying and unutterably beautiful, like a fleeting sense of Nirvana, grasped only for a moment and leaving you dedicated thenceforth to the single purpose of finding out the meaning of it.

Her lips were full, above and below, like those of the Grecian gods, and there was a mystically pagan tilt to them and her smiles were as comprehensive as a Thesaurus. Those lips were enviable, too, to Earthwomen, because they possessed a natural hue of deep rose, and an apparently velvety texture that would have been spoiled by lipstick.

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I could go on and on. You have seen her. You know of the golden texture of her skin, her supple grace, the single, veil-like garment all Vanyan women wear that is only half a sarong and much more transparent. To complete the picture, there were her perfect breasts, only partially covered by the veil. In fact, one was and one wasn't. Her bearing and her sparkling personality made you somehow accept her as she was, but you could never take those beautiful young breasts for granted.

You all know why I am dwelling upon the fact of her near nudity here. It has an important bearing on what I was to discover later in relation to their whole attitude on the subject of sex—which is one of the greatest differences between Vanyans and Earthmen.

Then on the other hand their concept of love was another story. In that regard we could meet on a common ground. More or less . . .

I HAVE mentioned that a wave of superstitious dread was developing throughout the world in regard to the Vanyans. Whether or not certain economic or political factions helped to augment that wave of fear and distrust and resentment is a subject which need not be elaborated on at present, but the fact remains that the adherents to this ideology of alienation were already taking matters into their own hands—a fact which actually brought Kria and myself together. In fact, our banquet that night at the Town House turned out to be one of the focal points of attack for the now historical anti-Vanyan uprising.

I believe we had just finished the shrimp cocktails and the bouillon was just being served when I made my first direct communication with Kria. By means of sign language I was indicating a curiosity in her reaction to our kind of food and trying to get her to describe to some extent what they ate on Mars. My two colleagues on my right were doing their best to help me out.

Kria beamed at me in a way that positively embarrassed me. Furthermore, she seemed to be oblivious of my would-be assistants. In a few moments, so was I. I was wallowing in her eyes and gamboling with her through pristine glades of thought engendered by her smile, her facial expressions, her manual gesticulations, and her whole personality. We did not seem to require a language of word symbology. Nothing crude enough to create sound waves and tickle our eardrums would have served to convey the consciously indefinable yet subconsciously delectable impressions she passed on to me. It was not telepathy, I insist, but rather a form of communication achieved through sheer personal magnetism.

I was thinking: My God but you're beautiful! Who cares what

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you eat?

And with her eyes and lips and her radiant personality she laughed soundlessly. Yet I heard that laughter echoing through the thought-glades of the extra-dimensional sort of little world that was a-building between us. I saw myself running with her, hand in hand, through dreams more vivid than reality.

I came to, with a start, to find Anderson, my colleague who sat next to me, pulling at my arm. He was on his feet. Others were on their feet, too, and there was shouting. On Kria's face I saw a look of alarm as she stared at the main entrance to the banquet room.

"What is the meaning of this?" I heard our master of ceremonies shout.

"There they are!" shouted someone else.

"Down with the Vanyans!"

A mob of men moved into the banquet room, brandishing guns. Drganu and Sanal rose slowly to face their attackers. They were unarmed. I heard them say something in their own tongue to Kria and she, too, got up.

It appeared immediately that there was going to be no opportunity of arguing with the intruders. They were after the Vanyans. The television camera next to the master of ceremonies turned just in time to give the outside world a glimpse of violence as one of the invaders struck the master of ceremonies over the head with the butt end of his pistol. This precipitated swift action on the part of the other members of Alpha Phi Gamma, but just as the free-for-all started someone conveniently turned out the lights.

In that exact instant I ran around the end of the table and grasped Kria's arm. It was the first time I had touched a female of the species, so I was unprepared for the delightful shock of vibrant warmth and personal electricity that shot to my brain. I knew a few words of the Vanyan tongue, so I was able to say, "Kria—friend —follow . . ."

She must have recognized my voice, because she followed me instantly.

I had officiated at several functions held previously at the Town House and happened to know where the doors were which led both to the kitchen and to the service sections of the building. We were knocking over chairs and banging into tables in the kitchen before anyone knew she had left the banquet room.

Fortunately, I made a mistake and opened a door which I thought would lead out the back way. Instead, I found myself groping about in a service closet. But the first thing I laid my hands on was someone's raincoat, which turned out to be equipped with a plastic hood. I immediately threw this around Kria and tucked her hair well in under the hood. Then I

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actually found the exit I sought and we went out. Behind us we could hear shouts, fighting, and the sound of furniture being thrown about.

Inasmuch as bold, swift action had accomplished this much so far, I reasoned that it was our only recourse until we reached ultimate safety. So I led her out onto the side street where I had parked my car.

We were just emerging from the narrow passage between buildings when three news reporters sprang out of a car and dashed toward us. They were about to pass us in an attempt to reach the scene of the turmoil through the rear entrance, but in the same moment one of them caught a good view of Kria's bare leg, then her Vanyan style sandals.

He gave a shout to his companions, and in the next instant the three of them blocked us as efficiently as an All American team.

"Here's a Vanyan dame!" yelled the first one.

"Luck!" responded one of his companions.

But they made the mistake of laying hands on her and myself to detain us. I took hold of two of them and shoved them off violently. I think I must have struck the third one in the chest, because he staggered back and came at me belligerently.

"All right, wise guy!" he shouted. "You're in the way. We want stories and pics and we're going to get 'em. Don't let's get rough!"

Already one of them had his camera ready and a flashbulb went off. People who had been running toward the entrance to the Town House now began to converge on us.

"See what you've done?" I argued. "This girl's life is in danger! Now we've *got* to make a run for it!"

As the reporter still blocked my way, I called upon an old reserve of strength and muscular coordination left over from my athletic days and threw my two hundred pounds at them. I made a path for Kria and took her hand. Silently, she followed me on the run.

But it was exactly like a fox hunt. The hounds had scouted out their prey and the howling and the chase began.

"Hey! There's a Vanyan trying to get away!" I heard someone shout.

"Who's the guy with her?"

"Probably a copper. Get her, quick!"

Flashbulbs popped behind us. The sound of many running feet grew loud in our ears. Some men tried to intercept us and I straight-armed them rather neatly. Hands reached out and tore at Kria's raincoat, which soon came off.

Suddenly, we were piling into my Ford convertible and I was starting the engine. Bodies crowded around us, hands reached in. There was a bedlam of shouting.

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"Get out of the way!" I yelled, as the engine started.

The Ford pulled away sluggishly as the crowd actually tried to hold it back. In the next instant, I was racing toward Sixth Street, intent upon reaching Virgil Avenue so that I could head for the Hollywoodland hills, Cahuenga Pass—and the San Fernando Valley. I crossed Sixth and went on up to Third. Just as I turned into Virgil I discerned three sets of headlights in my rear vision mirror. When you are traveling as fast as the road will allow, you know when you're being followed.

At Beverly the lights were against me. I couldn't wait, so I went through. As luck would have it, there were no police cars or motor cycles on hand to intercept me—as yet. But I knew I couldn't race across town at this pace and keep ahead of my pursuers without attracting the police, and then the whole thing would be at an end. I reasoned that even the police might not be able to do anything against the mob, and before order could be restored Kria might actually get hurt.

For the moment, the situation all seemed to boil down to one thing. Outracing my pursuers was a bad choice. Outsmarting them would be better. It all depended on who knew the city best. I needed a temporary hiding place.

I darted into a side street and began a laborious threading of residential mazes in the general direction of Vermont Avenue. The Los Angeles City College was not far away, and I had keys to some of the buildings. Several times I still discerned headlights in the rear vision mirror, but now there were only two sets.

All this time I was only vaguely aware of Kria sitting next to me. She had been fumbling in the glove compartment for something, and finally I knew she was looking at a city map.

Suddenly, just as we hit the bright lights of Vermont Avenue, I did a double take at her and almost wrecked the car.

She was completely naked. Even the veil had been torn from her in the mad rush.

"Kria!" I shouted, inanely, as I barely missed colliding with a streetcar.

She looked up at me sweetly, just as though nothing were wrong. She murmured something at me in the Vanyan tongue, and I caught the word, "Where?" She was indicating the map.

I signalled to her to get down out of sight. As she failed to comprehend, I put my hand on her back and gently pressed her down beside me. Suddenly, she understood, and in the next moment she was curled up on the seat beside me like a contented kitten. It was all I could do to concentrate on my driving, and there was no time to remove my coat to cover her with it.

But why should she want to

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know *where* I was going? Furthermore, she did not seem to be overly concerned about her father and her brother, back there at the Town House. Then the thought struck me that the Vanyans, after all, might have taken certain precautions prior to coming to the city. Did they have an emergency plan of action in case of danger? Why should Kria be so interested in a city map?

Vague apprehensions assailed me. Were the witch-baiters right, then? Were these beings from the stars truly supermen who merely presented a gentle face to conceal their real proportions and abilities? Would this attack upon them cause them to reveal their true natures, their hidden weapons and powers, making us seem suddenly like so much captured livestock?

"That's for the comic books!" I muttered, angrily, and pressed the accelerator to the floorboards.

And now, at last, I discerned a red light in my rear vision mirror and heard the blood-chilling sound of a police siren. Sooner or later, it had to happen.

But Melrose was close, which meant that the City College was within reach. I took a chance, intending to explain later to the authorities. There were racing headlights following that police car, and I knew what that meant, Reporters, mobs, violence.

I swung around behind the college and skidded to a stop. In an instant, I was out of the car, leading Kria toward the darkened buildings. There was a trap door under the bushes nearby. It led into the tunnels that carried the steam and water pipes. I doubted that they'd think of looking there.

I found what I was looking for, and we climbed down into the dark passage. I lit a match and we duck-walked along next to the insulated steam pipes, putting a good distance between us and the trap door. When I came to three branch tunnels I relaxed, momentarily, and we caught our breaths. And I stopped lighting matches. Retinal fatigue came in handy to keep reminding me of Kria and how she looked, crouching there beside me like some idealized version of the primordial *she*.

Through it all she had remained as calm and unworried as a clam. I even began to wonder if her species were possessed of an instinct of self-preservation. It was at such times that I sensed the alienness of her, for all her obvious and natural attractions.

She put her hand on my arm, trustingly, waiting. I had a distinct feeling it was she who was waiting for certain foreseeable developments of her own imagining—not I. And I wondered who was leading whom. All I could do was wait for the dust to settle and then take her to a more suitable hiding place.

Suddenly, the small lights went on in the tunnel, and I knew what that meant. The police had found

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the watchman, and he had led them to the boiler room, which gave access to the tunnels. We could hear the pipes clanking. They were coming for us.

For one fleeting moment I considered what might happen to my reputation as a college professor, caught in a tunnel with a stark naked Vanyan woman—and just at the beginning of the school year. But then I thought of graver things. The primordial reasoning that was behind all of this confusion and turmoil. Apes chasing lost angels. A rotten egg splattered across an original Michelangelo. A bowling alley terminating at an altar.

It all made as much sense, this terrestrial reaction to the Vanyan visitation. There was an aspect to finality to my situation—like bridges burned behind one. Irretrievability.

Kria grasped my arm and spoke one of the few English words she had mastered. "Up!" she exclaimed, urgently.

I looked into her eyes, or tried to. In the illumination offered by the lights of the tunnel I observed her more plainly than I had before. There was something of finality in that, too. Possessiveness. The threads of our years had come together, somehow. From here on out I had the feeling that those two threads would be woven together.

"Up!" exclaimed Kria, tugging at me. "Out!" Something in her eyes told me that she had reasons for getting out of the tunnel which might surprise me.

I moved, leading her back toward the trap door we had entered. When we came out under the bushes we could see about fifty men running about the campus. Kria tugged at my arm, trying to lead me out into the open, right into the center of the campus, where everyone would see us.

"Follow!" she commanded, in her own tongue.

"Are you crazy!" I blurted out, in English, and I held back.

But suddenly she pointed to the sky.

Even before I saw it, I knew what to look for. I might have known it. The Vanyans *were* prepared for an emergency, and their powers *were* beyond us. Kria had been *en rapport*, somehow, with her people. They knew exactly where she was.

The disc settled slowly, almost majestically, toward the campus. It showed no lights. It was merely a lesser darkness in the night sky, dully reflecting the city lights. If Kria had not pointed it out to me, I'd not have seen it until it landed. The men running about the college buildings looking for us did not see it.

We began to run, then, out into the open. Even before we reached the general area in which the disc was going to land, our pursuers spotted us. Somehow, a white, naked body shows up well in the

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night when it is running across green grass, with or without a bewildered college professor in tow.

"There she is!" came an exultant shout.

"There they both are!"

"Get 'em, men!"

The mob began to close in. But suddenly they all came to a standstill as the disc lowered abruptly into view and then quietly landed. Its great port lights glared into sudden brilliance and a door opened. A Vanyan guard appeared with the familiar little bird-cage and glowing bulb which had been described as a paralysis weapon. I guess it was, because the crowd did not move or cry out.

Kria and I went up the ramp and into the Vanyan ship without molestation. The ramp folded inward, the door closed, and the floor almost buckled my knees as we rose into the sky.

MY FIRST impressions of the flying disc were necessarily blurred because of the rapid maneuverings which were forced upon the pilot in this tense situation. I had an impression that they were trying to rescue Drganu and Sanal, which they did, because I saw them later. Long afterward, I gathered the story that the two had simply surrendered to the crowd. The police had interfered and managed to place them in protective custody. Then the Vanyans had come with their paralysis weapons and rescued them.

But this was only the beginning of trouble. The anti-Vanyan revolt was world wide. I soon perceived that we were being followed as we raced outward into space. And the only thing that could follow a flying disc was another flying disc. Ergo, my own kind had either succeeded in building facsimiles of them by now, or they had captured a few Vanyan vessels.

Their one weak point, I gathered, was a human limitation in regard to acceleration. As I struggled to keep my consciousness, I caught a blurred view of Drganu and Sanal bending over me. Beyond them I saw a weird, three-dimensional miniature of space behind us. There was the vast globe of Earth, pale lavender in the moonlight, and silhouetted against it were half a dozen pursuing discs. I knew what the problem was. To outdistance the pursuers would be to kill me with the pressure of acceleration which only they seemed to be able to stand. The Vanyans *were* different, after all. They were superhuman.

I stared back at Drganu and Sanal, like an animal caught in a trap. The terrible pressure of acceleration was causing their facial contours to sag into grotesque caricatures of men, thus accentuating the impression in my wavering mind that they were monsters in human form. I think I screamed at them and told them to go away.

Then later I thought: They could destroy the others, but they

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don't wish to. They *are* benevolent. It was not they who started the trouble. They intelligently recognized this momentary uprising as something that would soon be quelled by established governmental agencies.

But delirium twisted my thoughts again, and I told myself that they were very, very clever—not wishing to spoil their camouflage of benevolence. It was not yet time for the blow they were preparing. With phlegmatic calm they were sidestepping the insult and fiendishly biding their time.

After that, I passed out. But I dreamed of Kria. I saw her smiling face. I saw her naked body, afar, running toward me across an infinite plain of black ebony, arms stretched out in yearning. She wanted me. I think the thought sustained my life's forces under the brutal pressure of acceleration that finally caused the pursuers to give up the chase. Or it might have been the injections they gave me. Or both.

But I was in love with Kria. It was a fact which I accepted without questioning why.

The Vanyans brought me to Mars at her request, because she thought I would be in danger back on Earth. As it developed, the danger to myself was not great. I might have been arrested for questioning and then released.

But that is how I came to Mars and took up residence there—until certain governmental forces from Earth caught up with me. . . .

THE rest of you came there later. I was the first to behold the new planet. And then I knew, with a certainty, that the Vanyans were truly benevolent. They were a god race which could have destroyed us as a mere whim, if it chose to do so. They were great enough in their science and intelligence to handle us without subterfuge. They was no necessity of laying groundwork for conquest. That could have been accomplished at any time.

They came to that starved out world and filled it with titanic stresses, awakening within its core the ancient fires and the sustaining forces of nature. Long before they landed, earthquakes were caused to rage through the ancient crust, raising whole new mountain chains which were designed to catch the moisture which they intended to provide for the Martian skies, to catch it and pour it through rejuvenated soil into fresh new rivers, which led into lakes, which poured into embryonic seas, thus establishing the cycle of evaporation and return.

They bored swiftly into the planet's depths and installed their gravitation equipment, capturing the globe in a restrengthened spherical vortex of sub-electronic fields of force which comprised mass attraction—and thus a stabilized atmosphere was assured. Their great engines of power oper-

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ated electro-chemical plants designed to release oxygen from the soil. They established miniature suns in orbits between Deimos and Phobos, providing additional light and warmth.

All their stupendous technology was not dedicated to necessity alone, but to the aesthetic sense, as well. A harsh, soulless race might have been content to eke out an existence in barren deserts under skies that were unrelieved by the changing phenomena of nature, but not the Vanyans. Their eyes were not blind to the beauty of the rainbow and the splendour of cloud-framed sunsets. Their ears were not deaf to the patter of rain and the crash of thunder. They required the aesthetic setting of broken horizons, of verdure clad hills and the misted plumes of distant waterfalls, the cool presence of placid lakes, the crashing spray of an ocean's surf—and the song of birds. That was one of the first things they wanted of us. A shipment of live songbirds.

Those scare-mongers who were behind the anti-Vanyan uprising should have thought of that. Their bogeyman from space asks not for unconditional surrender. He requests a shipment of songbirds. And later, sheep, cattle — and honeybees. A very sinister race, indeed!

There are only about fifty thousand Vanyans, or rather, there *were* about that many; yet their city covered almost one hunderd square miles. It was a city that offered the ultimate in technological efficiency and yet succeeded in not being a city at all. The only stationary buildings were the Palace of the Council, the Central Research Laboratory, a few specialized factories and the oxygen plants. There were no shopping centers, no restaurants or amusement centers—not even colleges in the architectural sense. Each Vanyan household was a self-contained unit which could fly, when desired. According to individual tastes, each household "sky island" could land where its owners pleased—beside a lake, at the ocean's shore, on a mountain top, or in some secluded valley. If it became necessary for one member of the household to travel to another location, he could do so by means of teleportation, which to the Vanyans was as simple a matter as dialing the desired call frequency of one's destination. A Vanyan citizen could visit a spot a hundred miles distant and return home all within one minute, if he chose to do so. To attend concerts or attend to business it was not necessary to come to "town." As we see events via television they indulged in the cultural life by means of tri-dimensional visi-sonic apparatus. By means of remote controlled robot extensions they could even sign papers at a distance.

Education was another matter. Every mature Vanyan was a third order teacher. A third order teacher

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conveyed knowledge. Leisure was such that every younger Vanyan could find a teacher of the third order and acquire knowledge at will. Motivation was such that the students learned on the basis of personal volition. There was no institute of third order learning, but knowledge was dispensed with an underlying pattern of prescribed order—on the unit system. Certain broad units of knowledge were delineated for mastery. When the student could demonstrate a satisfactory accumulation of knowledge, he sought out those second order teachers who actually made it a life's work to guide the minds of others. A second order teacher was on the social level of our most prominent medical specialists. He taught intelligence, or developed it. The application of knowledge, and the evaluation of it.

It was only the first order teacher who lived in a structure designed for mental instruction. There were many such "sky islands" dedicated to first order education. A first order Master dedicated his life to the awakening of wisdom in his advanced pupils. He could take them to a secluded spot on the planet and spend weeks there, if he chose, without interruption. Sometimes there were no lectures at all, nor any discussions. There was only an exemplary way of life—a grasping of concepts for which there was no word ideation possible. Wisdom could not be taught, actually. It was acquired through the method of exposure to higher wisdom.

Thus—new Mars, a Shangri La surpassing all others. . . .

MY FIRST instruction was in language. And my charming third order teacher was none other than Kria, herself. Thanks to an extensive academic background in philology and a highly sensitive "Sprachgefühl," or language feeling, I was able to find my way gradually through the intricacies of a language that had no limitation on the number of its grammatical cases or its types of declensions. Once one mastered the key to the underlying basic language of inflections, original composition of the whole morphology was possible, and in each case the listener would be able to understand and appreciate the method of expression. Here was a place where the true poet was envied, indeed! As a philologist I could digress at great length on this subject, but that would lie beyond the scope of my objectives here.

The most eloquent commentary I can make in regard to the Vanyan language is that its poetry could *never* be translated. An attempt at translation would be like the crash of a tree in a forest where there were no ears to hear. I have read poems or heard songs written in three different ways, all with the same words, the same rhyme and meter, but with subtle

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changes in inflections or declensions which brought about increasing intensities of meaning, or sometimes a different meaning entirely, often conveying a concept not attainable through words alone. Thus far can description go, but no farther.

Weeks passed, and months passed, while I lived and moved about in a world of dreams more poignantly vivid than any reality which my own world could have offered. News trickled through, from time to time, regarding events on Earth. I was even aware that Earthmen had come to Mars, that some of them were even residents there, on a temporary basis, for technical reasons. But I never saw them during the first few months of my sojourn. I succumbed to the overwhelming charm of this synthetic little world, to the point of irresponsibility. There was something there waiting for me to absorb—wordless, indescribable. I felt its slow development in me without being able to describe it other than to say that, perhaps, I was becoming, in fact, a Vanyan.

At the end of the fifth month, I was ready to really have a talk with Kria. My basic vocabulary and mastery of the inflection key enabled me to compose new meanings and thus get my point across. There were many things I wanted to know. There was much that I had to say—to her alone. By this time I was an established member of Sanal's household, and many mysteries had presented themselves to me which demanded an explanation. For example, so far I had not seen one Vanyan child . . . Nor a very old man or woman.

At my request, they had moved their "sky island" into a picturesque valley which was just over the hill from the plain of Tharsis, on which stood the permanent center of the Vanyan civilization. From the hilltops you could see the marble-hued towers of the Palace of the Council and the simpler lines of the Central Research Laboratory, in addition to dozens of the flying discs which were always on hand. Beyond lay the shimmering expanse of the new Sea of Tharsis, and along its shores were atmosphere plants, releasing oxygen from the soil and augmenting the processes of evaporation from the sea.

We had taken a walk to see the sunset, and naturally we turned our steps toward my favorite spot, at the foot of a waterfall, by a beautiful pool, from which point of vantage we could look out upon the plain and the sea. There were young trees about us, but the chief item of vegetation was a vine that grew everywhere, rapidly sheltering the soil and conserving it against erosion from the frequent and sudden showers. One other type of vine bore large, white blossoms at this time of the Martian year. It grew up the cliffside on either side of the waterfall, making of the whole place an area of pris-

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tine beauty, a place for meditation and, I knew, love-making.

Kria wore the traditional Vanyan veil sarong, which hardly concealed her beautiful form, and a gentle wind from the sea pressed it enhancingly against her. As for my own apparel, I had adopted the dress of Vanyan men, which consisted of little more than a short, split skirt and the equivalent of a G-string, plus sandals. Drganu had presented me with a jeweled medallion which I wore around my neck. It distinguished me as a guest of honor living under the protection of the house of Sanal. A simple series of exercises had helped me to put muscle tone back into my physique so that now I was not ashamed to match contours with any of the Vanyans. Even in outward appearance I was getting to be like them.

A description of this setting would not be complete without mention of the *sleth*, a three foot, silvery globe that accompanied us, floating through the air and guided by a small box of controls and electronic gear attached to my waist. The Vanyans were addicted to moods as many Earthmen are to a graceful indulgence in alcoholics. They could not be happy for very long without music. The *sleth* was a floating portable radio, of sorts, but which filled the surrounding area with three-dimensional music. The symphonic notes seemed to emanate from everywhere, until you felt you were a part of them. After due adjustment to the effects of a *sleth*, you ceased hearing the music, and there was only the mood—like a subtle addition to one's personality. It was like feeling "high," but infinitely refined in its subtleties.

I did not know, as yet, that the *sleth* had other functions. . . . At which time, I suppose, it might be called a *sleeth*, or a *slith*, depending on the shades of meaning which were applicable in relation to its activities. . . .

"Kria," I said, abruptly, after a considerable period of silence during which we had watched the distant natural sun sink out of sight and observed the rise of a synthetic, nearer sun, "why are there no children or old people here?"

She answered me with silence. I looked at her and found her eyes surveying me with an expression which could only be interpreted as sorrow—or perhaps wistfulness.

Finally, she said—and somewhat hesitantly, I thought—"Perhaps it is time to tell you more about my race. Sooner or later, you would have to know. . . ."

Which remark left me waiting for her to continue. I waited.

"We are immortals."

"You—*what!*"

"There is no death unless it is willed. Of course—violent destruction—"

"But—to live forever—how is that possible! No, skip that. Tell me this. How old are you—*really?*"

"By Earth years, I am as young

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as you."

"Then—not long ago you were a child. . . ."

Again, the wistfulness. "I was—" She hesitated, groping for words. "Yes. Yes, I was a child."

"Then why don't I see any children of a newer generation?"

"We are immortals. New—that is, an increase in the population is a serious thing. There is a very strict control on that."

"You mean birth control."

"Well, yes. . . . You see, when someone chooses to die, another Vanyan can come into being. During this important period of our transference to a new world, there is no time for such considerations. Later, when things have become quite well established, the oldest philosophers will go and make way for the youngsters again."

"Oh. But you know, the same relationship does not seem to exist here between man and woman as it does on Earth. You're all quite indifferent to each other's attractions, just like so many brothers and sisters. Don't any of you ever fall in love?"

The *sleth*, as though responding to our moods, rose to a crescendo with its music, then faded to a whispering lament that was barely audible above the roar of the waterfall.

Kria grasped my hand, tightly. "There is love," she said, quickly.

"So? In that case, what do lovers do?" I was being deliberately pointed in my remarks. I held on to her hand, not willing to let it go.

We were playing breathtaking games with our eyes. It was a sort of duel, and I must have broken through her guard.

"Oh Ray!" she suddenly cried out. And she was in my arms.

I crushed her to me and kissed her, and she responded with all the feverish thirst for love that had been pent up within myself.

"Kria," I whispered to her, when I could catch my breath, "didn't you know this was happening?"

"Yes, yes! I did!" she exclaimed. And with that, she pushed away from me. There were no tears in her eyes, but there should have been, from the looks of her.

I have mentioned before that there was much to be seen in Kria's eyes that was a fascinating mystery —something vast, terrifying and unutterably beautiful, like an awareness of a pitiful cry that wants to reach you but can't, as though the gods were trapped in a bottle at the bottom of some lost ocean and were crying out, unheard. This is what I saw in her eyes now. It was a distant pleading that was forbidden expression.

"Kria, darling!" I blurted out, taking her into my arms again. "What is it?"

She only sought my lips and clung to me in unutterable desperation. Then at last she said, "There are things I should tell you—yet I can't. But I love you!"

Love was a sword that had cut

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many a Gordian knot cleanly through. The immortal opening lines of Oscar Wilde's *Panthea* came to me, accompanied by indescribable music from the *sleth:*

Nay, let us walk from fire unto fire,
From passionate pain to deadlier delight,
I am too young to live without desire,
Too young art thou to waste this summer night
Asking those idle questions which of old
Man sought of seer and oracle, and no reply was told.

I picked her up in my arms and carried her over to a large, flat rock next to the pool. She lay there silently until I lay her down on the rock and kneeled there looking down at her.

Then she said, "Something I should tell you cannot be told, but someday—"

I kissed her. "Someday you mean everything will be straightened out?"

"Yes! Oh Ray, I swear it!" She reached out for me. . . .

For sweet, to feel is better than to know,
And wisdom is a childless heritage,
One pulse of passion—youth's first fiery glow,
Are worth the hoarded proverbs of the sage:
Vex not thy soul with dead philosophy,
*Have we not lips to kiss with, hearts to love, and eyes to see!**

**Panthea*, second verse—Ed.

These lines were but a mild reflection of what the ingenious *sleth* was singing to us on high, as pale Deimos rose to face the diminutive Vanyan sun across the Sea of Tharsis and I lay beside my love.

SUDDENLY, the *sleth* became silent, and Kria suddenly tensed, staring up at it. She sat up quickly, pushing herself away from me, straightening her hair.

"Kria!" came the voice of Sanal, her father.

When I looked up at the *sleth* I saw there his face looking down upon us. He was not angered, nor was he smiling his blessing upon us. He was sad.

"Come home, you two. . . ."

Before we could argue about it, his face disappeared. And the *sleth* was silent. It hovered, waiting for us to leave.

I looked at Kria, embarrassed and a trifle piqued. "Do you mean to say that the *sleth* is also a visiscope?"

She nodded. "It's all right," she answered, taking my hand and getting up. "It was all coming to this. It will be interesting to hear what Sanal has to say."

When we came "home," just over the hill, both Sanal and Drganu were waiting for us. They had a way of studying us both that angered me. It was like prying into a private world that be-

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longed to only the two of us.

"So you have seen us," I said, hotly. "It's just as well. I'm going to marry Kria. . . ." An inane sort of puppy defense, but it was all I could think of at the moment.

"Come in," said Sanal. "I want to talk to you." Which was obvious.

We all went inside.

Sanal sat down and studied us a long time again before he spoke. "You realize, of course," he said, "that this is the first case of personal attraction between Earthman and Vanyan. Have you considered the possible consequences?"

Since the question was directed at me, I answered, "There are always consequences. We are in love. The consequence is—we want to get married."

"I know. I know. But you are not aware of the facts in regard to our race. . . ."

I stood up, impatient, fists suddenly clenched. "Then let me in on it!" I blurted out. "What's the big secret? Do you go into chrysalis at fifty and turn into bug-eyed monsters!"

"Raymond!" admonished Kria. She sounded like my wife already, but I liked it.

"On the contrary," replied Sanal, gravely, "you might say that our hidden secret contains the reverse of an unhappy ending. I only wish to warn you that we do possess a racial secret, and that you must never ask us whence we really came, for if we told you the truth it might spoil your marriage with Kria—yet if you waited long enough there would be no need for telling you anything, because the whole thing will right itself, in time."

This was the reverse of the Lohengrin theme. I looked into Kria's eyes, wondering if there were a swan song stored within her that I might have to listen to at a later date.

"Kria," I asked her, "for our sake I'd like to have you answer just one question. Would you call your marriage to me a deception?"

Drganu and Sanal exchanged serious glances, then looked at Kria.

"Sanal has warned you," she answered. "The end result of our marriage will be perhaps even more than you have wished for. Therefore, I see no deception."

"You know," I said to the three of them, "I think we're going around in circles. Kria and I want to be married."

Drganu and Sanal smiled and got to their feet. Kria gave a little cry and ran to me. My arm went around her, and Sanal placed his hand on my shoulder.

"Congratulations!" he said, forgetting for the moment the Earthly custom of shaking hands.

I grasped his hand and shook it, and Drganu offered me his. I gladly accepted them as my new "in-laws."

"Regarding a home for you," said Sanal, "we will have to apply to the Council for that. Or did you

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have in mind taking up residence back on Earth again?"

"Well, I guess I can't stay on Mars too long without renouncing my citizenship, so perhaps Kria and I had better plan on going to Earth—after we are married."

The three Vanyans stared at each other.

"But—" said Kria, "darling, we *are* married!"

I think I gaped at her.

"You see," said Drganu, "in our civilization the graver the decision one makes, such as this one you two have made, the closer it is attached to honor. If the decision is sacred, so is the honor that seals the bargain. Ceremony would merely be a mockery of that which words should not attempt to express."

"Of course I will see to it that this is registered with the Council," said Sanal.

"Wait a minute!" I interrupted them. "If I ever want to take Kria back to my own world and present her as my wife, I'll have to satisfy the requirements of our own laws. There has to be a legal ceremony and a proper registration of this."

"That might be arranged," said Sanal. "Already certain government officials from various countries of Earth have set up what you call 'consular' offices here, for the purpose of legalizing Vanyan visits to Earth and keeping track of Earth citizens on Mars. You might—"

"Come to think of it, I really have been out of touch with my own world. If such procedures have been established here already, I'm staying here illegally. I'd better make contact with the United States consul, if there is one here, and reinstate myself as a citizen. Then at the same time I can look into the matter of a wedding."

DRGANU accompanied Kria and me to the U. S. Consul's office in the Palace of the Council. The three of us entered the office laughing over some little joke of Kria's, all of us conversing rapidly in the Vanyan tongue. The consul looked up at us and seemed to suppress a frown. He was a middle-aged man, somewhat overweight, of a reddish complexion that reminded me of high blood-pressure —and he was obviously not fond of this job which removed him to such a great distance from baseball, bars and Bromos. Seated next to him, however, was another type of Earthman. I saw plainclothesman or F.B.I. written all over him. Tall, gaunt, pale of complexion, with a prominent if acquiline jaw and with a legal file cached away behind each of his pale, penetrating blue eyes. Both men had been conversing but as we entered they fell silent and surveyed us as though we were Indians coming off the Reservation with a water rights complaint.

They sat there waiting for us to speak, so I began. "I am a United States citizen," I said. "My name

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is—"

"Since when?" interrupted the Consul.

That stopped me, but I saw a light began to glimmer in the narrowing eyes of his companion.

"We have no record of a Vanyan becoming a citizen—"

It was then I realized that I should have renovated my Earthman clothes. I was dressed as a Vanyan, or undressed like one, and I had come into the office speaking the Vanyan tongue with what to them must have been perfect fluency.

"Wait a minute," said the plainclothesman. "That English is too good. Who are you?"

"I am Raymond Sanders, of Los Angeles, California."

The Consul tore his eyes from Kria long enough to raise his brows at me. The plainclothesman snapped to attention.

"Ye gods!" he exclaimed. "I just got here and my job's done! I came here to trace you."

"Why?" I said.

"You're a U. S. citizen. You disappeared. The story was that the Vanyans kidnapped you."

I laughed. "On the contrary, they sort of rescued me during the anti-Vanyan uprising. I have been living in a Vanyan household ever since, and now I want to get married. This is Kria, my fiancee. And this is her brother, Drganu."

The Consul half rose to his feet. "You *what!*"

"I said we want to get married. I want to know how to legalize it according to Stateside laws—or Earthside laws, to coin a new term."

"But—!" The Consul was apparently at a loss for words.

"Hold it!" exclaimed the plainclothesman. He looked us over carefully, and I almost saw cogs whirling swiftly in his brain. "Could you excuse us for a few moments?"

Drganu and I and Kria stepped outside into the great halls of the Palace, proper.

"Your world is very complicated," remarked Kria, holding onto my arm.

"It seems to tie itself up and get strangled in its own complexities," put in Drganu.

I could have given them a lecture on the subject, but I was busy wondering what was going on in the Consul's office. Something bothered me, vaguely, like a dark premonition, but I soon threw the feeling off, embracing the simpler and cleaner philosophy of the Vanyan. Honor and idealism were impregnable fortresses. I had only to stick to my guns, without subterfuge, and the battle would be won.

Within three minutes, the Consul, himself, appeared at the door of his office. His attitude had changed remarkably. He seemed to be vitally interested in our case. With a pleasant smile, he ushered us back in. The plainclothesman merely sat where he had been before. There was a

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somewhat baleful expression on his face which I did not like.

"I think," said the Consul, "that everything can be straightened out. First we'll legalize your residence here and then we'll get down to the business of the marriage. . . ."

We were married by the Consul next day, after I had received a provisional passport, a Vanyan resident's visa and a Vanyan alien's carnet of identification. Drganu was best man, Sanal gave the bride away, and Mr. Motter, who turned out to be a special U. S. agent attached to the United Nations in some way, was a witness. The legalization of our marriage was almost overwhelming.

Then they told me about the string that was attached to the whole business. Or rather, Mr. Motter did. And it wasn't so much a string as a ship's hawser.

He asked to see me privately and the Consul gave us his office. When we were alone he came up to me and shook my hand gravely.

"Congratulations," he said.

"Thanks," I answered, "but you don't seem to be referring to the obvious."

"I'm not. I'm referring to your unique position to be of great service to your country and to your native world."

"Oh, oh."

"Sit down. I want to talk to you about that."

I needed to sit down, all right. And I was also trying to contain my temper. If what I was thinking was true—

"You have resided on Mars longer than any other Earthman," he began, with enviable smoothness. "You are also a trained linguist and have evidently mastered the Vanyan tongue as well as come to understand their way of life. By the medallion you were wearing yesterday I see that you have been accepted as a member of a Vanyan household. And now this marriage between you and a Vanyan woman completes the picture."

"*What* picture?"

He saw my belligerence but he was prepared to take that in stride, too. These special agents didn't acquire their posts for nothing. That was often the difference between them and the usual type of character we have representing us abroad. That's what special agents were for, I reasoned. They were fill-ins for places where the chips were down and the going was rough.

"Why did you voluntarily seek a U. S. Consul here on Mars and attempt to reestablish yourself as a citizen of the United States of America?" he asked me.

I shrugged. "Habit. Gregarious instinct. The need for a sense of identity, I guess. I have to be *some* kind of a citizen. I don't prefer to be a man without a country."

He impaled me with a stare. "Is that all your U. S. citizenship means to you?"

"Look! I don't duck draft boards. I'm just as good a citizen as any-

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body else."

"I know. And you've been a taxpayer, too. But, as a professor attached to the American educational system don't you think you should adhere to a more clearly delineated patriotic policy?"

"I'll put it this way. Patriotism is like religion. It's kind of personal. When Pearl Harbor happened—"

"I know. I know. You volunteered. Well that wasn't nearly as important as what you can do now. Then a people were in danger, as well as cherished ideologies. But now the entire Earth is in danger, and it hasn't much to do with ideologies, unless you could tack an *-ism* onto the word, Freedom."

"If I picked a label for your speech I'd call it 'razzamataz.'"

"Please don't be facetious, Sanders. If you don't believe what I tell you, take it on authority. While you've been dreaming around the hill country with your fiancee, things have been happening."

"Such as?"

"So damn much benevolence from the Vanyans that we can already see the pattern behind it all. It's a gigantic booby trap."

"I'm still listening." I really was. I had only gotten married. I hadn't gone deaf. If the Vanyans really were up to something, which I still doubted, well—again there was instinct. Preservation of my own kind. I wanted to know what the Government claimed to know, and here was my chance.

"Consider all the weapons and technological gadgets they've given us. Suppose I told you that they all have a common denominator in the form of a remote control unit? True, those controls are supposed to be for our own use—" He leaned forward to drive his point home. "But there's nothing we can see to prevent them from controlling everything we've got on Earth —from up here, on Mars."

I sat there and studied him, trying to be calm and collected in the middle of incipient apoplexy.

"You have no proof of that possibility," I stated, finally.

"Would you like to prove that we're all wrong?"

That was a clever way of putting it. I couldn't turn my country down—or the whole Earth, my own native planet. On the other hand, I liked the Vanyans tremendously. Here was a chance to prove them villains or friends, and I could hope to prove the latter.

"In other words, you'd like to deputize me as an agent."

"Exactly. You would be representing the Government of the United States—the O.S.S., to be exact—as well as the United Nations."

"What is it, specifically, that you want me to do?"

"Remain here in residence on the pretext of taking your honeymoon here. But get around and see if you can find us a clue to their real intentions. Actually, the ideal discovery would be the mas-

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ter switch for those remote controls."

"Ideal? It would mean interplanetary war."

"If that's in the cards, we naturally want to be in a position to strike the first blow."

"Uh huh. Well, I think you're wrong, but if you're right—I'll tell you."

Motter got to his feet with a wan smile on his face. Again he extended his hand. "I guess you're all right, Sanders," he said. "And that's why I say—congratulations."

"Yeah."

I did not feel too happy. I was a spy against my wife's people. Nice . . .

SO IT was that Kria and I started taking our honeymoon on Mars. I had double reasons for traveling, so by the authority of the Council we were issued a small version of the interstellar type disc, and we managed to get around. Kria was still my third order teacher, and as I had expressed a sudden interest in Vanyan technology she personally escorted me to various strategic spots.

There were no security regulations covering atmospheric plants, or their atomic power stations. I even went through Research Center and Communications — interplanetary communications. I studied their methods of production, learned the intricacies of their weapons.

But there was no master switch —so far. I made weekly reports to Motter, and he was disappointed at my lack of concrete progress. I was not. But I kept my eyes open, as directed.

One day in Sanal's house I was introduced to an important Vanyan—a first order Master teacher by the name of Ralsyan. He was supposed to be centuries old but he looked about sixty—a healthy sixty.

He was very much impressed with my mastery of the Vanyan language and invited me to witness a tour of first order students under his guidance. Kria and I went along in his "sky island" school, in the company of about twenty Vanyans who were almost of Sanal's age. And one night in a lonely region of Mars I was permitted to stroll with Ralsyan alone in the desert and converse with him.

"Perhaps you can tell me something that I have long hesitated to ask anyone else—even Kria, my own wife," I said to him. "You are a wiseman and can consider certain vital questions in the absolute sense."

"I should be glad to help you if I can," he answered.

"All right. Then tell me this. Why are you Vanyans so willing to give us Earthmen all your technological secrets—your method of space flight, your weapons—everything? You don't even seem to be much concerned about defense

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against the possibility of attack. After all, your total number is infinitesimal compared with the population of my own planet. Our industrial capacity is tremendous in comparison with yours. In another couple of years—"

He laid his hand on my arm and smiled. "Now that you have acquired a knowledge of our tongue, perhaps I can explain it to you. I know exactly what you mean, of course, and as a Vanyan I appreciate your concern."

We walked on across the sands in the light of Phobos and one artificial sun satellite. Earth stood out in the sky like the biblical Star of the East.

"You see, as immortals we abhor the thought of death by killing more than anything else. To lose one Vanyan life would be cataclysmic to us. In cases where wisdom has been obtained—which lies beyond knowledge and mere intelligence—the loss would be very great, indeed. So we have only one form of protection against violence from our neighbors. It is the firm knowledge that they will *not* attack us."

He held up his hand as I was about to interrupt, and went on. "The cause of war is a difference in potentials, which causes discontentment and suspicion. We have attempted to reduce the difference in potential to zero, by making our neighbors as strong as us. We could not tolerate the idea of maintaining constant defenses against possible attack. We can only know that our neighbor has good intentions when he is able to attack and does not. Then we can be assured we are at peace."

"But—that's leaving yourselves wide open!"

"Perhaps—"

"It doesn't make sense. You tell me you abhor the idea of death by violence, yet you take a mad gamble by giving us all your weapons, and we can out-produce you a million to one!"

He shrugged. "There is the parting line between mere rationality and wisdom. You must wait until you acquire wisdom."

"I don't know about that. The way I see it, you people have no instinct of self-preservation at all."

Ralsyan laughed. "If you only knew!" he exclaimed, cryptically.

There was the first dangerous remark I had heard. Here was the first hint of a hidden weapon. My ears felt like rabbit's ears. But how could I get him to let me know what he was hiding?

"I'd like to know," I said.

He patted my arm. "Some things cannot be told," he replied. "You will have to wait. Someday it may be revealed to you."

This harkened back to the cryptic remarks made by Sanal on the day I declared my intentions of marrying Kria. To say that I was assailed by a sense of frustration would be putting it mildly.

Now I *was* discontented and troubled. Could my Government

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be right, after all? Were the Vanyans wolves masquerading in sheep's clothing? —to use a cliché. But no. There was such a thing as sensing the intentions of another The Vanyans were intrinsically benevolent. I could judge them by my own, gentle Kria. I would have staked my life and gambled a world on the conviction that there was nothing deceitful or malignant in the Vanyan nature.

But how was I to prove this now?

"I have another question. You people are able to redesign any world to suit your own physiological needs—anywhere. If you value your lives so much, how come you haven't established yourselves on a more isolated planet? Why set up your civilization here so close to Earth and give us the means of reaching you through space?"

"That is related to the basic nature of our purpose in life," he answered. "Of what use is wisdom or knowledge if it cannot be applied? Happiness is derived from striving toward higher goals, and Man's goal is always knowledge and wisdom. But not wisdom in a vacuum. We have deliberately sought contact with a race that could use our help and guidance. It's the way we prefer to live, evaluating our accomplishments in *relation* to expanding achievement. Therefore you might say that Earth is a sort of catalytic agent to our endeavors. To live for ourselves alone would be anathema."

Here was almost an incomprehensible vista of benevolence. I gave up, for the time being. But I present this conversation as further evidence that the Vanyans were as close to being gods as it is possible to be in mortal life. Study it well, and remember—Earth stabbed them in the back. YOU destroyed them!

A FEW days later, Kria and I had the intention of going "over the hill" again to watch the sunset, by the waterfall. She was still in the sun-ray mist bath, or Vanyan version of "shower," when I called her, so I walked on ahead with her promise to meet me there soon. I did not bring along the *sleth* as on previous occasions because my mind was troubled. I was even wondering how I might question Kria about her people without arousing her suspicions, yet I was angered by the thought that this cloak and dagger intrigue had entered the picture in the first place.

I had no sooner arrived at my favorite spot near the pool below the waterfall than I discerned the lone figure of a man ascending the slope of the hills from the direction of the Palace of the Council. Long before he arrived at the pool I knew it was Motter, Earth's special agent, who had actually been masquerading as the U.S. Vice-Consul on Mars.

When he came within earshot he

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said, "I thought I'd come up here to take a look at the sunset and the sunrise. It's the only place I know of where you can watch both simultaneously."

"And you came to get another report," I told him.

"A double sun phenomenon and a strategic report affecting the fate of a world, all in one spot," he grinned. "Can you blame me?"

He offered me a cigarette, but I refused it just as though I were a native Vanyan. He smoked and we both watched the true sun sink and the first artificial sun rise. Deimos and Phobos were both near the zenith, and Earth was a gleaming diamond in the darkening sky. After the real sun sank, the combined light of the two moons and the synthetic sun produced a brilliance comparable to full moonlight on Earth.

"Well?" he said, finally. "Anything new? You went on a little trip, I hear, with a first order Master—name of Ralsyan. He's big timber among the Vanyans and second only in the Council."

"You really get around, don't you?" I retorted.

He shrugged, waiting. His pale blue eyes watched me.

"Okay," I said, "I did pick up one thing." I told him in detail my entire conversation with Ralsyan that night on the desert. When I came to the cryptic part of it where Ralsyan said, "If you only knew!"—Motter raised his brows.

"So that's the way it stands," he remarked. "Well, maybe we were right, after all, Sanders. When I first gave you your assignment, you might have been chagrined to know that we are well prepared to meet the Vanyans in combat. Now, however, perhaps that fact will be of some consolation to you."

I remained silent, and finally I did ask him for a cigarette. I puffed on it rather furiously, more troubled than before.

"Look!" he added. "I'm going back to Earth for a few days. I think the home office would be interested in Master Ralsyan's remarks. In the meantime, you'd better concentrate a little harder on getting vital information. Don't forget that the Vanyans might be able to snuff us out with a flick of the wrist, and our only protection may be to strike without open provocation—unless you can show us that we're wrong."

Just then, he staggered and put a hand to his forehead.

"What's the matter?" I asked him.

"Damn headache," he said. "It's the planet. Some of us get *saroche*, you know. Altitude sickness. The atmosphere isn't quite built up to normal yet."

As I made no comment, he finally added, "Guess I'll go back now. This is getting me down."

I watched him in troubled silence as he staggered away in pain down the hill. But I did not watch him for long. Suddenly, I, too, staggered. But I did not hold

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my head. I was merely astounded by the sight of the *sleth* as it appeared abruptly out of thin air within ten feet of me.

On its surface I saw the angry face of Sanal, and I knew that he had been listening to our conversation. I also knew that the *sleth* could be rendered invisible.

"I made him go away," said Sanal. "Will you please return here at once?"

There was something in his tone and facial expression that intimated that I really had no choice in the matter.

"I'm coming," I told him. "I'd like to explain something to you."

"I think that is in order," he answered, coldly. "Come quickly."

As I walked back over the hill, trailed by a very silent *sleth,* I wondered if I should regret having taught Kria English in exchange for lessons in her own tongue. And at the same time I realized that she must know about all this, because for Sanal to know she would have had to serve as interpreter!

She was there with Drganu and Sanal when I arrived at the semi-transparent "sky island" that was Sanal's home. Again I thought from the looks of her she should have been crying. But then the dark thought assailed me that Vanyans had no tears. And superstition asked the question: Is the race human that cannot cry?

She lowered her eyes, refusing to look at me, and it irritated me.

"Well?" I said to Sanal. "I'm here." It did not look like this was going to be an old fashioned evening at home with the folks. It had more of an air of the Inquisition.

"You are a spy against your wife's people," accused Sanal, in even tones. "Why?"

I told him. And I added, "I'm glad it's come up, Sanal. Let's get down to brass tacks. You know I want to help establish permanent peace between our worlds as much as you do. That's why I agreed to play it their way. I wanted proof that you were friends, not enemies. Now what's all this secret business? What are you hiding? For example, many scientific institutions on Earth have politely requested an exchange of biological information relative to comparative physiology between our races. In short, they would like to study an X-ray of a Vanyan. This you flatly refuse. If your structure is slightly different, why should that matter?"

Drganu appeared to tense, as though with anger, but he said nothing. Kria looked at me then and I saw the old mystery in her eyes. It was lost gods crying in a bottle at the bottom of the sea. A message from afar—untranslatable.

Sanal got up from his chair and paced the floor. "That is our business," he retorted, bluntly. "But it has nothing to do with the safety of your world. Nothing!"

"Then why won't you tell me!"

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I almost yelled.

All three of them stared at me. There was a prolonged silence.

"Listen to me," said Sanal, at last. "If your world destroys us, it will lose more than we. You had better do something to prevent them from attacking."

"There's another point," I argued. "You have no instinct of self-preservation. During the anti-Vanyan uprising on Earth you were calm as clams. Now you face the prospect of total annihilation with the bland statement that we will lose more than you. Why!"

"Don't ask me that, because I won't tell you. But I want to tell you this. I shall be forced to bring all this to the attention of the Council immediately. However, to bring this out into the open would definitely increase interplanetary tension. We will handle the situation secretly, from our side, if you'll do a little counter-espionage for our side."

"What?"

"You became a spy for Earth merely to prove to your own people that we were friends. Now I want you to be a spy for us for a reason that is equally constructive. Please realize that our weapons are not the kind that cause death. We cannot tolerate killing. We could not harm you. But if you tell us Earth is ready to attack us, we might be able to prevent such an event—without bloodshed."

"But—what about your magnetic disintegration? That could snuff out a world!"

"Its end use is related to physical obstacles. We dig great shafts with it and level mountains or clear our path of meteors and other debris during space flight. The disintegrater is not intended for killing."

"But it could be used as such."

"*We* could not use it for that purpose, but *you* could."

All this time I was doing private thinking of my own. I actually wanted to see what Earth was up to. I wanted to talk to the authorities and see how bad the situation was getting. If I could pretend to spy for the Vanyans, it would keep their knowledge of my activities under cover. I could play the game both ways and with my own deck of cards.

"Suppose I go to Earth," I said, "and look things over for you. I'd have to have a logical excuse—some vital secret to bring back. Can you think of something that would appear to be a vital secret yet which wouldn't harm you if you revealed it to me?"

"Yes," said Drganu.

Kria and Sanal looked at him wonderingly.

"One thing you did not examine very closely in your tour of our world was the *sleth*. I believe it would be valuable for Earthmen to be able to duplicate it, and you could offer the secret information —of which you only became aware tonight—that they can be made invisible."

"That's it!" exclaimed Sanal. "I

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think we can give you plans for the *sleth*, but I'll have to take it up with Council. The *sleth*, you know, emits various types of rays which could be considered as weapons. Your own people would look upon it as a rare acquisition, indeed, which, in fact, it is."

So it was decided. I knew I was playing both ends against the middle, and I didn't like it. To have denied my espionage against them in the face of concrete evidence which they had picked up by means of the *sleth* would have really created an obstacle for our side. Actually, playing their game was subterfuge on my part, but my objectives were sincere both ways. And that was what made it so difficult.

I tried to make up with Kria, but she resisted me.

"There are things here more important than individuals," she said. "I love you, Raymond, but I am bound to things beyond myself." She walked toward our room.

I began to follow, but both Sanal and Drganu laid a hand on my arm. I might have shaken them off, but there was a strange expression in their eyes which detained me.

"Among ourselves," said Sanal, "we are telepathic—and more. We feel the other's suffering. Your only recourse now is to prove to her that your marriage—can continue."

That did it. I flared up. "Where I come from, a man's wife is his property! It's a mutual situation, actually, but even one's own relatives have no right to interfere. I have certain prerogatives as her husband. If I want her to come to Earth with me, I can take her when the times comes—or she can stay for good!"

"You wish—to take her to Earth with you?"

"Not now. But I'm just saying, she's my wife, which is a very personal business."

"That is understandable, but among our kind one's world, one's society, the entire welfare of the race, is a personal business, too."

I went to "town" that night, via the teletransportation system, and stayed with the U. S. Consul. Motter had already left for Earth. . . . I availed myself of the Consul's private liquor stock and asked him if he could fix me up with an Earthside suit of clothes. . . .

IN THREE days I was on my way to Earth with a set of Vanyan plans for the *sleth*. Inasmuch as I had a chance to go in a ship piloted by Vanyans rather than Earthmen, I was supplied with a little case containing shots of the serum they had given me before for the purpose of enabling me to withstand more than ordinary maximums of acceleration and deceleration. Which was to come in handy later.

In Washington Motter traced me down immediately and I told him about the *sleth*. To make it look good I added that although

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the *sleth* was strategic stuff I had used it as an excuse to come home and get a better briefing as to what was going on. Again—both sides against the middle. But it worked. He took me in on the inside.

The situation was worse than I had thought. Public opinion was in favor of action against the Vanyans. Aside from the United Nations, the U. S. Congress was in a dither. U. N. decisions were slow in coming, and the President was faced with the necessity of thinking in terms of U. S. safety, regardless of U. N. decisions. Moreover, there was a sort of tacit agreement that Mars fell outside the scope of U. N. machinery as far as aggression or war was concerned. In other words, the Vanyan Government was not a U. N. member and therefore Mars was a sitting duck for anyone who wanted to take a pot shot at it. In fact it seemed the U. N. was *hoping* somebody would make a move so as to take the hot potato out of their hands.

I was present in Washington at a secret hearing on the Vanyan situation—strictly from the point of view of our own government. As an authority on Vanyan affairs and in the Vanyan way of thinking and the Vanyan language, I was questioned from time to time, but in all cases I perceived that I was regarded as a minor cog in the machinery. At the last minute it was decided to bring in a U. N. representative and go over the situation.

Before my eyes I suddenly saw the definite plans for an attack taking shape, and I demanded the floor. Grudgingly, they yielded it.

"I have it on authority," I said, "that the Vanyans are incapable of killing. I suggest an alternative. Call them in and explain the grounds for your fears and tell them the only way the situation can be relieved is for them to move somewhere else."

This proposal was met with a general ripple of laughter. The U. N. representative, an Englishman named Spaulding, answered me.

"As a citizen of a nation possessing a long history in colonization," he said, "I can appreciate the possibility of a man's going native and wishing to speak for the aliens among whom he has long resided. But there is something in legend pertaining to the dangers of eating the lotus too long. Pearl Harbor was a pointed example. I am afraid we shall have to reject your opinions as being distorted by your personal attachment to the Vanyans through your marriage with one of the heathens."

"An uncalled for insult," I retorted. "Rather than reverting to stereotyped form, I'll overlook the insult in consideration of its source."

The chairman of the committee rapped his gavel smartly and glared at me.

"But don't destroy the Vanyans," I warned. "You will be the losers

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—not they."

"Is he nuts?" queried one committee member.

To make a long story short, it looked like an attack was imminent, and I could do nothing about it. I walked out, stamping my heels. Motter came out after me and took hold of my shoulder.

"Sanders. Watch yourself!"

I jerked loose and walked away from him. Which was all the provocation he needed to put a spy on my trail from there on out. I expected that and acted accordingly.

The fellow who was tailing me must have been confused when I went to the Lincoln Memorial and stood around like a tourist reading the Gettysburg Address and gaping at the moonlit Potomac. I was really having a mental wrestling match with two sets of emotions. There was my country and my world, which I felt was not in danger, in spite of official opinions on the subject. Yet as an assigned agent employed by the Government it was not for me to question, but to do, I suppose. Then on the other hand, there was my wife and her people, whom I loved and trusted. Moreover, idealism came into the picture in regard to Earth's human society. I felt that the Vanyans could benefit us beyond measure and that we were on the verge of killing the golden goose.

Question: Should I warn the Vanyans? And if the Government was right, after all? Well, take it from there and you'll know what was going through my head.

I read the Gettysburg Address about a dozen times, but that didn't help. Far out in the sky beyond the Potomac was a little red light that was Mars. It was gradually losing some of its red as the mighty machines of the Vanyans gradually released the oxygen from the soil and veiled the planet over with a thickening atmosphere. Science, knowledge, wisdom—benevolence. About to be destroyed.

Question: If Earth destroyed Mars and was actually wrong in doing so—then what? A terrible loss to Mankind. I was convinced that historical blunder was being made. Moreover, fifty thousand wonderful people were involved.

I spoke their language. I thought in their language. I lived in their thoughts. This was an extra soul, which fought with my own.

Decision was mercifully taken out of my hands when a Vanyan disc suddenly swooped down in front of the memorial building. I caught the sound of scurrying footsteps as the agent tailing me ducked for cover. I think they paralyzed him.

Two Vanyans walked up the steps of the memorial building and addressed me in their own tongue. I was wanted back on Mars immediately. One of them carried a paralysis generator. Since it was more graceful to enter their disc

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on my own feet, I went with them.

How did they find me? Now that it looked like the chips were going down they were showing more of their cards. Personal direction finders. Mine had been set up shortly after my arrival on Mars. The Vanyans were benevolet and wise, but they were also smart. At least they weren't lotus eaters, themselves, even if I might have been accused of being one by the U. N. representative.

We were not long under way when the fireworks started. A communication was received by my "escorts" to the effect that I was to be returned to Earth at once. But inasmuch as the directive issued from the Government of the United States, they did not obey it. They were under orders from their own government to bring me in.

The ship's commander came to me and asked me if I had any acceleration serum for myself. When I asked him why, he turned on his three dimensional visiscope and I pretty nearly fainted.

Following us was not a ship, or a squadron, but every flying disc we had—an unsuspected fleet of them. They were far astern but coming fast. I felt very sick as I realized what had happened. My capture alerted the attack. They could wait no longer. This was it.

"It wouldn't make much difference if I didn't have any serum, would it?" I said to the Vanyan officer. "You wouldn't wait around here for my sake, would you?"

He smiled. "We feel that you are partially a Vanyan now. You deserved that much consideration." Without further comment, he turned and walked toward the control room.

I knew what was coming, so I brought out my little case and gave myself a shot of serum. And just in time. As I flung myself onto a couch, the lights went out.

Inside my head. . . .

I drifted between unconsciousness and fitful dreaming—awful delirium, in which I saw atom bombs crashing into Mars and making tall mushrooms over the wreckage of my wonder world.

"The fools!" I remember shouting once, referring to the Vanyans. "They wouldn't put up defenses! They'll be obliterated!"

And of course I know I must have called out Kria's name many times. Destruction or no destruction, she was my wife. I loved her and I didn't want her to die. Now the veneer of civilization was peeling off down to primordial instinct.

"To hell with everything!" I shouted. "They won't kill her!"

We maintained a good lead all the way, and in fact got ahead of the Earth fleet. When we swept in alongside the Palace of the Council at Tharsis, I knew I only had about an hour in which to act if anything was to be salvaged.

I went with the guards directly into a Vanyan Council. I saw the U. S. Consul and other Earth digni-

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taries scuttling out of the building in haste, entirely unmolested. Evidently the warning had come through. They were on their way to the Earth-built ships—ships that had been built on Earth by Earthmen, thanks to a Vanyan supply of a peculiar element that went into the makeup of the relay units controlling them. The Vanyans' own gift was being turned against them.

When I came into the Council Chamber I looked around for Sanal and Drganu and Kria. None of them was present. I dashed to the speakers' podium and yelled at all of them in Vanyan.

"Tell me the truth! Will you defend yourselves?"

A grave body of Masters looked back at me. They shook their heads negatively. Ralsyan, my one acquaintance among them, spoke.

"And it is your loss," he said. "Not ours."

"But you're not just going to sit here!" I shouted.

"It is too late to do aught else. We know what we sought now. The answer is: Earth is not ready for the higher way of life."

I shook my head, trying to clear it of dizziness. "All right! Then why was I recalled to Mars?"

"That you will discover in due time."

"The time is due right now. Listen, I can't understand your attitude and I'm not waiting. . . ."

I ran to the nearest guard and took his paralysis generator from him. Before they could recover from their surprise, I paralyzed the entire assemblage. I did not have to leave the room in order to escape. There was a first rate teletransporter there and I knew Sanal's call number.

So it was that in less than half a minute I stood in Sanal's private "sky island" once more, paralyzer in hand. Sanal and Drganu and Kria were there. They had been watching me in the three-dimensional viewer, and now they were on ther feet, forewarned. Kria hung her head and ran to her room—*our* room.

"I want all three of you to come with me," I said. "This idea of sitting idly by and waiting for the destruction is insane. Now you'll do it my way or I'll force you to do it!"

"We appreciate your concern for us," said Sanal, "but it's too late. However, in regard to your own safety—"

"To hell with that!" I blurted out in English. "Kria!" I ran to her room and took hold of her. In fact, I took her into my arms and hugged her. "Kria!" I exclaimed. "You know I love you. Why do you run from me? Come on! There is still time to go. I can't leave you here to die!"

Again there was that lost, far away look in her eyes and the longing in her to be able to cry. She suddenly gave in and her arms went around me, desperately. "Oh my love, I don't matter! It is you

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who must save yourself!" she gasped.

"Are you *all* crazy!" I exclaimed. "Come on! You're my wife and you're going with me!" I pulled her and she came, as though struggling against her own will, wanting to and wanting not to.

Sanal and Drganu blocked my path with a neutralizer of the paralysis weapon, making it ineffective. However, my two hundred pounds were not neutralized. I plunged through them. They were resilient, but they couldn't stand against me. I found their teletransporter and fought them while I dialed another frequency—the one that would put me at the Research Laboratory. Kria and I stumbled through.

"Raymond! Raymond!" she complained. "This was not meant! You don't know what you are doing!"

"The hell I don't!" I yelled, and we raced for a Vanyan disc outside the lab.

Then I stopped, suddenly, to ask her, "Tell me once and for all, Kria—*is* there a master switch, a master control of some kind which could make Earth's copy of Vanyan gear ineffective? You people wanted me to find out if Earth was going to attack. Now you *know* they are. Are your people going to sit here and die?"

"Raymond, the attack strikes too swiftly, and the speed of light—" She shook her head, refusing even then to reveal secrets to me. "It is too late—but not for you. You were brought here to—"

"Come on!" I interrupted her. "I guess it's my way, after all."

Earth's representatives had left. There were only a few Vanyan discs available, totally unguarded. I pulled Kria into one and made her guide me at the controls. . . .

Racing Earthward into the teeth of the armada, I sent out a call to the attackers, identifying myself so as not to get blown out of space before I started. In our three-dimensional scope we could see the approaching ships. Ahead of them, and near to us, was a

We saw flashes of light trace a pattern across that area where the Vanyan "city" was located.

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cloud of ponderous projectiles already launched and coming fast. We began to maneuver out of the way.

"Flagship to Sanders!" came an officer's voice. "If that's you, keep clear and hold course for Earth at half speed. We will pick you up. You are under arrest on suspicion of treason."

"Treason!" I yelped into the mike. "Somebody is—"

"You were a counter-spy for the Vanyans. You may blame yourself for triggering this attack."

"But I had nothing to do with it!"

"Ha! You made a brazen rendezvous with a Vanyan ship right in Washington—how stupid can you get! But there's no time now for argument. Follow instructions!"

"Damn Motter and his spy!" I muttered, as I turned off the transmitter switch. That I had planned no rendezvous with the Vanyans I knew, but it would be hard to prove otherwise.

Kria came into my arms. She did not want to talk. She merely wanted to be held close to me. We remained that way for some time, watching the fleet approach Kria's adopted world. Watching the projectiles approach, carrying their atomic warheads.

"Kria!" I exclaimed. "Now is the best time to analyze you and your emotions. Under normal circumstances, this would be monstrous of me—but *I've got to know about you!* What are you thinking? What are you feeling?" I shook her gently. "Tell me—now!"

We both looked at the three-dimensional picture of Mars and saw filtered flashes of light trace a pattern across that area where the Vanyan "city" was located. There were flashes farther removed, also, where power plants were located. Then the surface darkened slowly under the shadows of man made, mushrooming clouds. And all of a sudden we saw bright, jagged lines appear across the planet's surface as huge earthquakes were summoned into being and great gashes were cut into the staggering little world.

"The disintegrators!" I exclaimed. "For the love of God! The bombs were enough!"

Kria shuddered, tried to hide her face. "You are children, giant children," she said, "flailing about in darkness!"

I tried to lift up her chin, and when she looked into my eyes and saw *me* crying, it was too much. She ran from me and threw herself onto an acceleration couch. She actually suffered because she could not cry. I left her alone.

I was too overcome, myself, to give her comfort. I stood there looking at the destruction and I yelled at the three-dimensional color image of it. I can't repeat what I said because most of it would seem like gibberish. But I am not ashamed to say that I bawled, openly and uncontrollably.

It was about a day later that

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the Flagship overtook us and I was commanded to draw alongside the other much larger disc. As the capturing crew secured our airlocks for boarding, Kria rushed to me, alarmed.

"What is the meaning of 'treason?'" she asked me, having heard the commanding officer use the word over the receiver.

When I explained it to her, she asked, "But how can they accuse you of that? You are not guilty!"

"Thanks, sweet. But can I *prove* it!"

Her eyes were wide with concern, and there again I saw her looking at me from afar off, as though out of other worlds of her own. The old mystery, which would never be solved. I had given it up.

"What—is the penalty—for treason?" she asked.

I shrugged, saying nothing.

"You *mean*—they will *kill* you?"

"If I can't prove myself innocent. But take it easy—"

She clenched her fists and stamped her foot in anger. "Kill! Kill! Kill!" she cried. "Is that all your barbaric race can think of!"

"Honey," I said, trying to calm her. "Now there's no need to—"

"They shan't kill you! You cannot die!"

"Why?" For reasons which I could not have explained to myself, I wanted a specific answer to that question. There was more than personal emotion behind her insistent statement.

"Because—because—there is a reason! I can't tell you!"

Before I could argue about that, the inner door of our airlock opened, and armed M.P.s attached to the U. S. Navy Airforce stepped into the control room. They were armed with business-like, understandable, old-fashioned automatics.

"Stop!" cried Kria, holding up her hand. "This man is innocent! You will not take him prisoner!"

The M.P.s struggled to overcome their surprise at finding one Vanyan alive. Also, they must have been surprised at her English. But then their leader grinned.

"Okay, beautiful," he said. "Keep out of trouble. You're under arrest, too."

Kria did not budge. She stood there facing them, and all of a sudden I saw the M.P.s change their expressions. Their mouths dropped agape and in their eyes was both wonderment and fear. They became rigid and their guns dropped from their fingers.

I shouted at her, asking her what she was trying to do, knowing all the while that now she was *really* showing her cards. With sheer mental power she seemed to be capable of paralyzing them.

It was in that moment that a new detachment of guards entered the room and shot her down. I screamed, throwing myself at them, but they pumped bullets into her and she slumped to the floor. I punched hard, but something de-

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scended on my skull and I went out cold. . . .

I HAVE not seen Kria since then, but I am told I may see her after writing this story. I am told she still lives, and I thank God.

You all know what happened from that point onward. The Vanyans not only allowed us to destroy them rather than lift a finger to harm us. They made sure that we would not harm ourselves, because they knew in that last terrible hour that we were not yet ready for interplanetary civilization.

Even in their posthumous revenge, however, they were benevolent. They had set up the hidden master switch on one of the Martian moons, it is presumed. Those robot controls were set to go off *after* the last Earthman had arrived safely home. Mind you, they could have destroyed us at any time. They could have taken revenge while the fleet was still out in space. But they did not.

After we were all on the ground, the propelling apparatus on the discs quietly dissolved, as did all our supplies of the Vanyan element that made such ships possible, and their weapons. Those were incapacitated also, never to be used again. The Vanyan answer, gentlemen. After you killed them, their voice spoke out of the tomb of space and said, in effect, "*You are not ready.*"

And I agree. I shout to their noble spirits and proclaim them godlings — a golden, benevolent benefactor whom we have slain.

My fate matters little. It is *yours* with which we should be most concerned!

★ ★ ★

THEY told Ray Sanders he would not be able to see his wife until after the court-martial, but they assured him she was rallying slowly and had a good chance to live through her injuries. This pacified him to some extent, and it also motivated his desire to prove his innocence.

They let him testify, but as he continued referring the court to his story, which had been published all over the world, there was nothing new that he could offer in his defense. In regard to the Vanyan rendezvous in front of the Lincoln Memorial, it was only his word against theirs.

The Press was worried, but the Administration was not. Public opinion was largely on Sanders' side. Washington was being besieged with messages from all over the world. Some countries even threatened diplomatic reprisals if Ray Sanders received the death penalty.

But then the prosecution took over and X-rays of Kria's bullet-ridden body were presented as proof that the Vanyans were inhuman. They were a synthetic race. In a word—androids. . . .

Swiftly, the judgment followed.

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"Therefore, Raymond Sanders, it is the decision of this court-martial that you have been found guilty of treasonable negotiation with an inhuman enemy who stood ready to conquer and perhaps destroy not only your own native country —but this entire world."

The Press was released with the news, and Congress and the President watched the reactions.

The headlines fulfilled their fondest expectations: SANDERS WIFE INHUMAN! — SANDERS CONVICTED! — FEDERAL EVIDENCE BREAKS SANDERS — VANYANS PROVED MONSTERS! — X-RAYS PROVE KRIA FAKE HUMAN — U.S. SWINGS AXE!

The sympathetic world turned antagonistic overnight. The Government gained new prestige. They had been right, after all! Congress convened briefly, and the President signed the death penalty.

Then he authorized Sanders to see Kria. . . .

The Press was excluded from that meeting. Sanders, a visibly broken man, went alone into her hospital room. He was with his Vanyan "wife" a full hour before he was called out by his custodians.

He came out a different man. He was straight and tall again, and there was a new light of defiance and triumph and even joy in his eyes.

"I want to talk to the Press!" he exclaimed.

"Too late for that now, Sanders," the police officers told him.

"But I've got to talk to the Press!"

"Come on!" They pulled him along with them.

"The President!" he yelled. "At least let me talk to the President!"

In his jail cell he raved and swore and even appealed to fellow prisoners for aid, but his totally incredible story branded him as an insane man. There was a sympathetic shaking of heads.

"The poor guy. He's off his rockers!"

"I guess I'd be, too. He gets shot tomorrow morning."

The next morning, Sanders even argued with the officer in charge of the firing squad. "You don't know what you're doing!" he pleaded. "Give me one more hour! This is vital. I demand to speak to the President!"

The officer tried to be patient, but finally he lost his temper and called the guards. They took Sanders and stood him against the wall.

"No! I don't want a blindfold!" he told them. "I want to watch the sky!"

He stood there looking up into the brightening sky, and several times he called his wife's name.

"*Ready . . . !*" barked the officer to the firing squad.

"Kria!" yelled Sanders.

"*Aim . . . !*"

That was as far as they got. A few guards testified later that they observed a gold-emblazoned disc

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in the sky. It paralyzed the firing squad and the officer in charge. It lowered itself swiftly into the prison yard and Sanders ran to it. It took off with him, and he was never seen again. . . .

IT WAS then that the President of the United States decided he would have to have a talk with Kria. He, too, went into her room alone, while his bodyguards waited outside.

She lay there like any other rapidly convalescing patient, but she was far more beautiful than the normal run of women. Synthetic or not, she was an object of the Chief Executive's pity—belatedly.

"I want you to tell me what happened," he said to her. "Who rescued your husband? I thought we destroyed your race."

"You did," she replied, sadly. "But *my* race did not matter."

"Then—to whom did that mystery saucer belong—the one that rescued Ray Sanders?"

Kria smiled wanly. She indicated a chair. "Sit down, won't you? I think I can tell the story now."

She talked for a long time. She described for the President a truly human race of immortals who faced the necessity of making contact with us, of finding a world within a solar system such as ours on which they could continue their existence in accordance with their basic philosophies, as explained by Ralsyan to Sanders when he was on Mars.

"But immortals come to treasure their lives, not so much for themselves as for the knowledge and wisdom they have acquired. They could not risk contacting you directly, so they created us—their android extensions—to contact you first."

"Do you mean to say—that all the while your race was renovating the planet, Mars, your human counterparts waited somewhere out in space to determine what our reaction would be?" asked the President.

Kria nodded. "That is well expressed," she answered. "They *are* our counterparts. For each of us there is a human duplicate, in form and mind and personality, with whom we were in mental contact at all times. Through us they could sense everything we sensed here."

"Wait a minute! You mean—somewhere, there is a *human* copy of you? One who knows as much about Sanders as you do—who perhaps loves him, actually—*humanly?*"

Again, Kria nodded. "Yes, she loves him, and she is with him now—for all time. It is she who rescued him. In fact, she ordered him brought to Mars just before the attack, in order to pick him up there, so as not to appear in her ship in Earthly skies and thus reveal her secret. But your attack was too sudden. Limited by the

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velocity of light, she could not get here in time from the mother ship. Ray Sanders, alone, of all Earthmen, will join the true Vanyan race in search of a new home and a new race of people who, perhaps, will deserve their guidance more than you."

The President shook his head. He fell silent. After all, he *had* made a historical blunder. The truth might even cause his impeachment.

"You—ah—say the true Vanyans preferred to keep this a secret. Why have you told me?"

"I had to tell someone. It's all past now. They are gone."

"Well, we might as well keep this secret, just between you and me. The world would suffer greatly to know it was guilty of a great crime, after all."

"I don't care what you do."

"We'll say that some fanatic rescued him in a ship that *looked* like a disc; that we shot it down over the ocean. It will be simple enough to bury this whole story."

"Do what you wish."

The President, greatly relieved, looked at her kindly. "Why so sad?" he asked. "You are immortal, human or not. Think of the many years ahead of you—the things you'll see transpire here on Earth. Why, you might even land a movie contract, with your looks—"

Kria shook her head. "You don't understand," she replied.

"What don't I understand?"

She looked into his eyes and said, "You see—*I* love him, too."

THE END

The People Who Write SCIENCE STORIES

(Concluded from page 2)

thought I heard it and became a stamp dealer. Then I switched to writing advertising copy. Now I'm writing straight fiction. My science-fiction has appeared or is appearing in GALAXY, IMAGINATION, and, of course, SCIENCE STORIES.

I intend to keep turning out science-fiction. Right now, though, reams of notes mark time while my eyes are guiltily averted: very briefly, James Joyce sidetracked me. At Leonard Albert's seminars in literature at CCNY I drew as an assignment a chapter of *Ulysses*. That was my undoing, for I discovered a code threading through that labyrinthine work, and in the process of unraveling the clues, which led to other works of Joyce and to the works of other writers, I found enough material to begin work on two books at once—one on Joyce's use of code, the other a mystery novel.

Is there a cryptographer in the house? I've adapted Joyce's code and planted in this sort-of-an-autobiography leads to three messages. Good hunting!

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ROOT OF EVIL

By Edward Wellen

In this case the root of evil in no way referred to money; just ask Wilmer, he can tell you—or, he *could* have told you.

Illustrated by Michael Becker

NO ONE, it seems, can explain away the vanishing of Wilmer Kootz without dragging in the supernatural by its bedraggled tail. No one, that is, if you leave out me. And because I know you want to weigh the evidence for yourself, I'll give you the events leading up to the vanishing point—and let you take it from there. Here goes:

I was leaning out of the window to look down at the figure struggling across the campus under a heavy load. Dusk blurred everything in the scene into almost uniform grayness, but I got the feeling that poor Wilmer was cracking up. I pulled my head back into the room as he doggedly moved with his burden through the dormitory arch below. I returned to my seat and doodled sundry luscious curves on my chemistry notes while waiting for him to stagger upstairs and into the room we shared.

He elbowed the door open and gave me a perfunctory nod. Before he could set the bushel basket down it slipped from his weary grasp, tumbling out its contents as it crashed.

I clicked my pencil against my teeth. I examined my fingernails. I gazed at the ceiling. I cleared my throat. I said, "Turnips."

Wilmer busied himself wiping a film of sweat from his glasses. His naked eyes blinked rapidly. He said softly, "I hope you don't mind my bringing them here. I promise I'll keep them out of your way."

I was severely silent. Wilmer hurriedly replaced his glasses and peered at me. He evidently found reassurance because a smile kneaded his doughy face. He stowed his jacket in his locker. On the way back he looked over my shoulder at my notes. A puzzled frown crossed his countenance. "Hum," he said. "I must've dozed through part of today's lecture."

I watched him round up the

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turnips. Finally I said, "Wilmer, I can't hold out any longer. *Why* turnips? Or perhaps I'd better put it this way: why *turnips?*"

Wilmer's instinctive look of sheepishness gave way to one of holy fanaticism. He lifted up a maverick turnip and said, "You may not know that some vegetable tissue that grows at top speed radiates a kind of energy, energy that stimulates living tissue. For instance, if you place a turnip root at right angles to another root, with the tips one-fourth of an inch apart, the turnip will excite the growth of the other vegetable. Result, the number of cells on the vegetable's near side will increase by as much as seventy percent. And I'm going to—" For no reason that I could figure, he let his voice trail off.

I'd never thought of a turnip as being particularly exciting—even to another turnip. But Wilmer Kootz seemed to be going overboard.

"Wilmer," I said kiddingly, "some day I'll tell my grandchildren, as the little tykes accumulate around lovable old gramps, that

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I was the college chum of the great Kootz when he began his world-shaking turnip experiment."

So help me, his eyes gleamed moistly behind the thick lenses. And, as always, I was surprised. Wilmer so bordered on caricature of the bespectacled, befuddled, bookish type that I often had trouble thinking of him as a human being with human feelings. His pathetic gratitude shamed me.

To break a mood that was embarrassing both of us, I said heartily, "What say we cook up a mess of turnip greens, Wilmer?" He sprang protectingly in front of his turnips. Hastily I said, "After you're through with your experiment, of course. Wouldn't harm them for the world, Wilmer." He relaxed. "What *is* your experiment? You didn't finish telling me."

But he was evasively vague, and I wasn't sufficiently rapt about turnips to press him. And because both of us were tired we soon hit the sack.

WILMER was going through the motions of shaving his fledgling beard when I woke. I sat up in bed and stretched my arms. I froze in the middle of a yawn.

On Wilmer's pillow, a fraction of an inch from the impression of his head, a turnip reposed.

I cut into Wilmer's cheery greeting. "Wilmer," I said, "are *you* part of the experiment?"

His eyes flashed to the turnip then back to me defiantly. "Yes!"

I suppose I gaped; for the first time since I'd known him, Wilmer had shown something like temper. "Sorry I flared," he said more calmly. "I guess you had to find out sooner or later. And now you may as well know it all." He paused, but not for dramatic effect; Wilmer was histrionically anemic. He visibly marshalled his thoughts, then said, "Just because I look the student, people think I'm brainy. But my IQ is nowhere near the genius mark. You've no idea how I've sweated to get good grades, all because my folks were always telling me what heights I'd reach some day. It's a bitter thing to know your own limitations—and have others expect more of you than those limitations will allow."

I felt my face burn as I realized that what I'd taken for Wilmer's pathetic gratitude the night before could as easily have been an agony of humiliation if he had been aware that I was twitting him.

Wilmer was saying, "While I was in the library the other day I came across an old *Science*—the June 15, 1928 issue, I think. In it was an article called 'Emission of Rays by Plant Cells;' I've already told you the gist of it. Well, this thought hit me: here's this strange, untapped form of energy and here are the inadequate twelve billion nerve cells in my brain. . . .

"Now you know. I'm trying to increase my mental capacity so I can do things that are far beyond me now, maybe even surpass Ein-

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stein."

My first impulse was to laugh. Instead I said, and I meant every word, "Wilmer, I hope it works." And when a warm smile shined his face I found myself blinking hard.

IN THE following weeks the only noticeable change in Wilmer was the appearance of bags under his eyes, the effect of nights spent uncomfortably rigid. It had become a ritual: Wilmer would ease his head into a kind of clamp he'd rigged, then I'd strap his body to the bed, leaving his hands free, and he'd hold a mirror to watch anxiously while I placed a turnip root exactly one quarter of an inch from his right temple. Days and evenings Wilmer spent all his spare time testing fertilizers on the turnips growing in the pots that had whittled down our *lebensraum. Whew!* I still remember the reek.

I could see no visible reason for Wilmer's increasing cheerfulness, but one day he assured me that he had narrowed the field to a particular breed of turnip. He said he felt "in tune" with it.

It was about two months after the beginning of the experiment. I was positioning a turnip when I noticed a slight swelling of Wilmer's temple. I asked the immobilized subject, "Bump yourself today?"

He sounded surprised. "Why, no."

I touched a finger gingerly to the spot. "Feel any soreness, Wilmer? Any pain?"

"No." He reached up and prodded the swelling. And suddenly his skinny frame trembled with emotion too big for it, and he said in a choked voice, "It's begun! It's begun!"

TO FORESTALL a lopsided development Wilmer decided to alternate the point of stimulus: one night the right temple got the benefit of turnip emanations, the next night the left. And Wilmer continued to respond. The swelling grew uniformly now, steadily but imperceptibly. You became aware of it only when normal objects proved inadequate, as when Wilmer could no longer hook his glasses over his ears. He held them in place with loops of string tied to the side-pieces, but he gave up wearing them altogether when the flesh of his bulging brow began to overhang his eyes. The most outsize of hats was soon unequal to the project of covering that shining dome. Shining, because Wilmer had lost hair rapidly as his scalp expanded. That acreage was an inverted dust bowl, at the end of the third month.

Wilmer had to give up going to classes. His gait was too unsteady and the great bulbous head bobbled dangerously on its pipestem support. I feared that his neck would snap, and I urged him to recline in bed. He agreed willingly enough, because that meant he

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could undergo continuous turnip-excited cell development.

More than once I started to beg Wilmer to abandon the experiment, but always I fell silent when I looked into the depths of his eyes. Beady little things as they now appeared to be, the thought of the tremendous intelligence behind and almost enveloping them struck me dumb with awe and fear.

But it couldn't last.

The campus was a bee-hive of rumor, and one day the dean dropped in. He ignored the clutter of the room and directed his attention at the blank wall above Wilmer's recumbent form.

"Kootz," he said briskly, "I don't know what you're doing. I don't want to know. You'll have to pack up this—this equipment and leave. Whispers have begun to reach Senatorial ears that something queer is going on here. We want no investigations, Kootz." He whisked out.

He was a good old boy at heart, however, and he arranged for Wilmer to take sole charge of an agricultural experimental sub-station out in the middle of nowhere.

Although I was sorry to see Wilmer go, now I was able to attack my studies fully. For the rest of the semester I was busy making up for lost time, but as soon as exams were through I sped toward Wilmer's station. I felt both humble and exalted as I drove nearer to that mighty brain, for Wilmer might prove to be the hope of the world.

THE custodian stopped his lawn-mower and scratched an armpit thoughtfully. "Nope," he said, "come to think of it I *ain't* seed that feller for couple-three weeks now. Always keeps to hisself. You can look around, if you want." He started his machine again.

In Wilmer's living quarters I found only strewn clothes and a few rotting turnips. I started a tour of the greenhouses, hoping to find him at work. I strolled through one given over to hydroponics experiments. Neatly aligned tanks, containing a variety of growing plants, stretched to the far end of the structure. As I passed, I glanced approvingly at the luxuriating vegetables. I paused before the huge tank at the end.

There, with a vestigial expression of contentment, was *the biggest turnip in the world.*

"Ask him if he has one that writes under methane."

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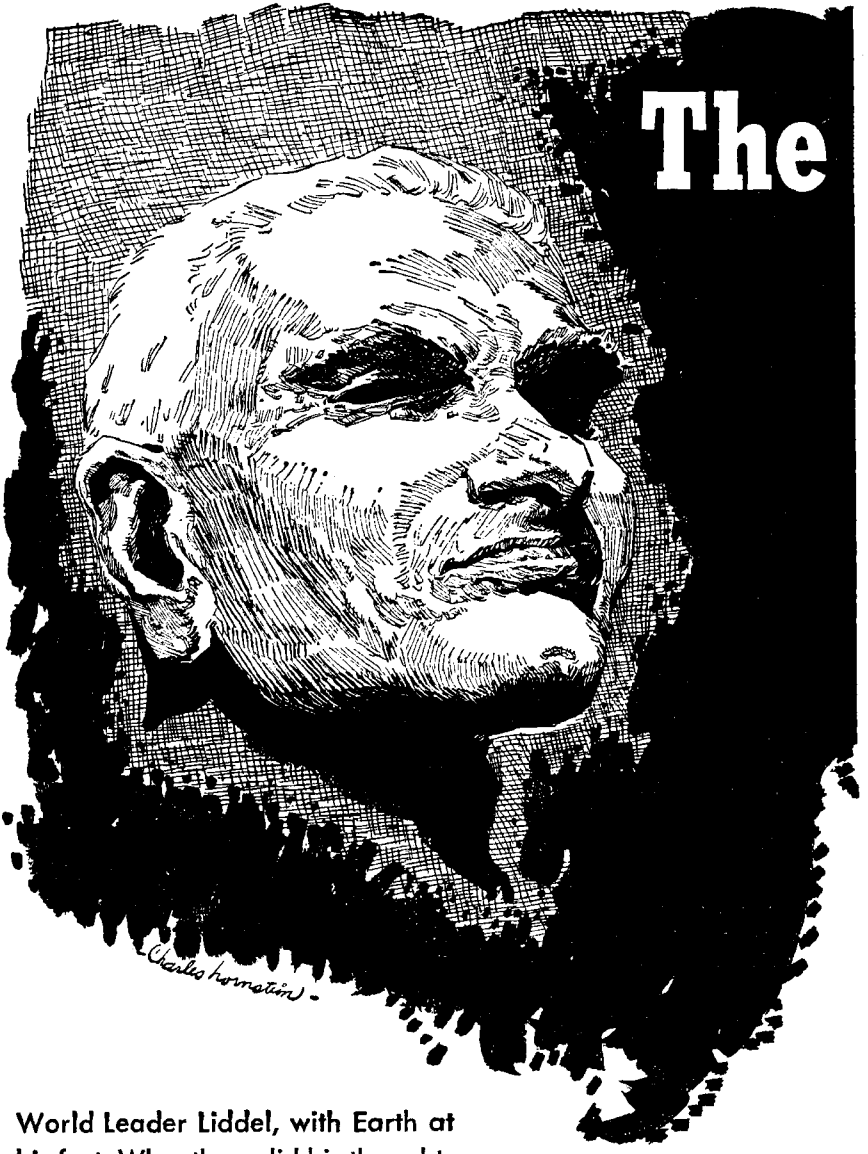

World Leader Liddel, with Earth at his feet. Why, then, did his thoughts return to World War II, the shelling of Caen, and a Bridge? And who was the girl waiting for him in the strangely familiar meadow?

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Bridge

By S. J. Byrne

Illustrated by Charles Hornstein

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WORLD LEADER Stanley Liddel stood on the balcony of his New York palace and patiently received an ovation from the ocean of humanity that filled the streets from sidewalk to sidewalk and as far in either direction as he could see. He did not require this mass adulation subjectively, because he was a man singularly well balanced and free of complexes. But then again, *they* required it. They needed a leader. All of human society had needed leaders since the beginning. You had to be father, or mother, to them.

The crowd below was waving victory signs at him—the triple L.

"Long live Liddel!"

The tumult continued unabated, record-breaking in its intensity and duration, while his twenty-five year old son, braided and bemedaled, stood behind him and joined hi unprepossessing mother in a quiet smile of triumph, because "father" was following the party policies without a struggle, and it was paying off in a manner to satisfy their fondest personal ambitions—though those ambitions, unknown to the mother, were violently divergent.

Liddel looked at the one hundred foot screen above the street where his image was magnified to match the powerful amplification of his voice. Noticing the moody droop of his aging mouth, he reshaped his facial expression into the mechanical mask of a happy and benevolent leader receiving the praise of his "children." He saw that he was still tall and endowed with an impressive physique and posture, his head erect, his large, jet-black eyes still piercing, almost hypnotic in their dynamic power, with his kingly mane of graying hair adding a crown of glory to his wide and unusually lofty brow. He was a composite of ideals pictured in the mass mind—a perfect symbol of leadership. The power of his personality and full, rich voice, his perfect but simple eloquence, his basic, razor-edged logic that no one could refute, his unfailing deduction of probabilities in relation to a given course of action, his sweeping, positive organization and implementation of improvement programs, his contributions to military science which had proved war to be futile and resistance to the "will of the majority" sheer insanity —all these things and more formed the basis for their aclaim.

He had to be a leader, as long as he could, and when he stepped aside his son, Norman, would have to be the Leader in his place. Because, leaderless, they would fall into a state of anarchy over petty nationalisms and racial distinctions and divergent ideologies all over again.

There *had* to be a leader—even if it was wrong, basically, to deny them a chance at self-determination.

He sighed, inaudibly, but maintained his benevolent mask.

"Salute!" cried his son, behind him, above the tumultuous shouting of the people.

Which reminded Liddel, suddenly, of another mechanical symbol. He raised his arms, elbows bent, and

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touched the backs of his hands to his forehead, the double salute of the World Federation Army—which he secretly called the "Double Cross" because World Federation was now a full-fledged dictatorship. He, Stanley Liddel, was Boss Man Number One, with life or death powers over any man, woman or child on the face of the Earth.

But just now he was tired, hungry and bored. World dictatorship was now routine after that last outstanding victory over the armies of the opposition. There was nothing creative left.

There was the cancerous sore in his soul. Mental atrophy. A necrosis of ideals. A pointlessness to going on. Except that if he did not go on, neither would they!

But where were they going? Was there really a higher goal than food, clothing, shelter, work, security and unfailing service to the State?

What was Man's real purpose?

This mental soliloquy was interrupted by the searing impact of something against his skull, followed by the report of a high-powered rifle. At first there was a sensation of force, like the kick of a mule. Then came heat—and vertigo. He saw a wisp of white smoke lingering over the roof of the building across the street. The complete silence of the people below was like the sudden shock of thunder.

Then real bedlam burst forth, and he fainted in his son's arms, with the distant sound of automatic rifle fire growing marvelously more distant until he rested in a dark well of nothingness . . . After seeming eons of senseless drifting in peacefulness, he was suddenly jerked upward and hurled into pandemonium.

* * *

NAVAL and aerial bombardment converged on the beach. Night became a staccato complexus: flaming day — tempest — black infinity striated with doomfire — suffocating sound.

He ran, staggering over the quaking sands, dodging bodies, piles of equipment, flying debris. One flash of light was almost instantaneous, but its sheer strength bled all color out of the landscape. He saw the little town, its lead-lined windows, leek-grown gables and tiled roofs and chimneys standing out in stark black and white relief. A hysterical old woman was beating at two men with a stick as they tried to get her out of harm's way—wherever that could be. A white chicken—it might actually have been red or black—flew crazily around between roofs, and in the tiny sound crevices between the bomb blasts and the answering ack-ack and cannonfire he even heard the thing squawking.

"Crazy creature!" he yelled, inanely, principally because it seemed necessary to yell, as he ran, not knowing where.

Then came the sound of the shells over his head, ponderous shells fired at sea, shells that ripped through the air with a deadly sound that its hearers were not supposed to live to de-

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scribe. The sickening, lugubrious, horribly insane sound of the first dangerously close one cut a swath through the battle bedlam, as though searching him out, and the little glands under his ears and the cords in his neck tightened, like glass, brittle. Hard in its wake came a second one, closer still. He saw it hit five hundred feet ahead, and whole sections of village seemed to rise like some cluttered spider's web on the breeze, in slow-motion unreality.

Directly in front of him now was a bridge . . .

It was made to carry the beach road over a drainage channel, but it might as well have been a railroad trestle, being constructed of wood piling and railroad ties. Incongruously, an empty champagne bottle hung suspended from the bridge by a kite string, the soundwaves now buffeting it about as though it were dangling in a cave of winds.

He had just passed a large shell hole that was already drawing seawater at the bottom of it, and several uniformed figures crouched, shivering, below its rim, looking out at him with white, indefinable faces. He paused, undecided whether to take the hole or the deep drainage channel.

Shell number three howled in upon him and he dove under the bridge. As the world split cleanly in half, with instantaneous abruptness, he screamed in agony . . .

* * *

TWO doctors held Liddel back in the white bed as the third one gave him another injection. They were trying to slide him forward enough to prevent his bandaged head from striking the wall behind him. Failing in this, they moved the bed forward, assisted by a small contingent of interns and nurses from the therapeutical brigade standing in the aisles of the surgical ward.

"I know that particular scream," said Dr. Pollard, after Liddel had quieted down and they had strapped him in. "It's a recurrent nightmare he's experienced every year or so since—" He caught himself, not turning to look at the staff behind him but showing with a sideward glance of his eyes that he was cautiously aware of them. The two ferret-eyed bodyguards standing at the head of the bed stared at him deliberately, waiting. "—since World War Two. He was a captain then. Infantry. This is a lingering remnant of shell-shock. I believe he was injured at Caen. That's all of thirty years ago, so I've long since considered this vestigial recurrence to be chronic. If that's all that's wrong with him after that fracture we're fortunate."

"Doctor Pollard," said the consulting brain specialist, respectfully, "what—ah, is the nature of this nightmare? What does he dream of?"

For some reason known only to Liddel's wife and his personal physician, the subject was taboo. Dr. Pollard looked daggers at his interrogator.

"A bridge," he answered. Then he turned away, leaving no opening for further discussion.

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BUT Liddel was dreaming of something else now—something that always followed the nightmare with a contrast like cool water on parched lips. This was his exclusive secret, which he shared with no one because it was personally basic, a source-root of humanness that sent a saving elixir through the semi-petrified tree of his life at times when the superficial foliage had been ready to suffocate.

He was young, strong and tingling with life, striding up a curving, graveled path toward a building that might have inspired the architect of the Parthenon. The gravel on the path was composed of small blue crystals which, at night, glowed softly, leading the way for him no matter when he arrived. But it was not night now. The creamy, cool sunlight of an early summer morning caressed him as much as the whispering wind from the sea at his back. Birds sang in the wet, flowered meadows that sloped abundantly toward the coast. Somewhere ahead in the garden pergolas, harp trellises responded to the wind with a singing almost subjectively registered, incapable of discord.

And there, running down the path toward him from that massively beautiful building, *she* came—with her arms outstretched and her white robe and her raven hair flying, and her thoughts and her spirit surging ahead of her to meet with his, it seemed, in the center of the space which separated them. He leaped toward her with a gladness that could not be contained, and she came swiftly into his arms, as though the pain and roughness of that unheeding collision were required to satisfy the longing of months. He kissed her and they grew giddy with the sense of their vital need for each other and the overwhelming satisfaction that they received.

Then the dream stopped. It always stopped at that point. But he remembered her—the nameless girl who loved him in a God-honest, unsophisticated way that was long lost to another age. It drained the strength from him, the longing that the end of the dream left behind.

Her eyes were like the glowing blue path that always led him here, and they were open to him. Everything in them was for him. Her lips—

Sometimes Liddel even woke up sobbing when he had this dream. What was it? Such a thing had never ocurred in his life. Why was he tortured by it? He did not know. He only knew that it was a torture he could not do without. The ecstatic pain of the experience was his most precious memory—a memory of an event never lived . . .

* * *

ONE month later, Stanley Liddel looked at his wife across the breakfast table and idly sought the answer to two questions: What gave him the idea he had an appetite, and why had he married Cecily? The difference between her and his breakfast, he reflected, with an irrepressible smirk, was that the latter was fresh

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and soft-boiled.

"What's so funny?" Cecily fired at him.

"Nothing is funny," he said, sobering with the bitter thought that he spoke the truth. "In fact, I have a pain in my head."

That was an acceptable explanation, inasmuch as the bullet wound had left him afflicted with recurrent head pains, but if Cecily had "harrumphed" he would have sprung to his feet and called her an unmitigated battle-axe. In these graying, autumn days of their life she had grown to love no one but herself, all public affectations and subterfuges for propaganda purposes to the contrary. The only reason she was close to Norman, their son, was again because his plans apparently operated in such a direction as to guarantee her a continuance in her elevated station of unequaled security and power. An obscure Red Cross nurse in her youth—when he first knew her—and now the First Lady of the world!

He had been indebted to her in the beginning, when she had volunteered to watch over him in that French hospital. There were too many wounded, too few nurses, and she could have been rotated and gone home in spite of all that. But she knew the intricacies of his case and had volunteered to stay on.

In those days she had been somewhat pretty, but no more prepossessing among young girls then than she was among *pince-nez* dowagers now. Since his recovery from the valley of the shadow of death had been an all-consuming preoccupation in those days, and since she had obtained the closest understanding of his condition, both of them had allowed themselves to become deluded by the idea that they had much in common. And so they had gotten married.

But those two years of precarious convalescence had produced more than a marriage. He had had two years to think, painfully and clearly, in the still nights when the morphine or other drugs did not work, and out of that prolonged period of meditation had come his new personality, the personality that had, in fifteen short years, gained him the presidency of the United States. At which time World War III exploded in his face, giving him emergency powers that were broader than anyone had ever dreamed of.

The secret weapons, the swift application of counter-propaganda and a general intellectual disillusionment with communism—in addition to certain powerful contributions of his own in the field of science *and* diplomacy—had not only brought victory to the Democratic Allies, but Federation to the world. In his fiftieth year, he had been elected president of that, too. And then there were those who feared that he would have to hold office until they could find a man of equal stature to replace him, lest powerful undercurrents pull the whole structure down into anarchy and chaos.

As Alton Staggs, a diplomat and intimate friend, had once put it, "It's a case of riding the proverbial Tiger,

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Stan. But sometimes we can't figure out who's the Tiger—the State, or you!"

And so the World Federation Armies had gradually consolidated around a group of political thinkers who felt that the machinery could not be changed by mere elections and representation. The power and influence of these thinkers in the world had been sufficient to popularize the idea that Stanley Liddel was the temporary knot that held the lid on all the old troubles of the world. He was giving them a period of grace in which to arrive at more far-reaching conclusions in regard to the management of a World Federation. Moreover, the world was tired of strife and destruction and hunger and death, and Stanley Liddel was a brilliant, capable, convincing leader. Gradually, the fiction of democratic planning dissolved into daydreams and an ineradicable dictatorship materialized into hard fact.

Not that Liddel enjoyed waving the ultimate mortal sceptre. He would much rather have retired to some obscure, picturesque fishing village and spent the rest of his days dreaming of a glowing blue path that led him forever up through the flowered meadowlands and into the incredibly responsive embrace of a young woman he had never known, but who loved him deeply and honestly in that unreachable world of Nevermore.

No, he would never even see the fishing village. He was riding the Tiger—straight to Hell. When he got too weak to ride it, his son would try to take his place and the beast would get out of hand. Countless millions would die in the flames of misguided insurrection—and all in vain. For they would never get back to where they were, being weakened more than ever before, except after the passage of centuries.

Sometimes he would lie awake and think: *What would have happened to the world if I had been killed at Caen? Maybe they would have found a way—a way of working it out for themselves. It was easy to follow the leader during the darkest days. So they followed me. And now the whole social structure of humanity is built around me! But what if I had not survived Caen? Would the world have founded a government guaranteeing at least fifty percent self-determination? Lord knows there is no self-determination now—and the majority of the people love it, or at least they're good parrots.*

"Stanley!" his wife barked at him, finally losing interest in the telecast news headlines racing across the table in front of her plate. She was a narrow-shouldered woman of fifty, with a sallow complexion, a pinched figure, dyed hair and false teeth. Her face, with the wrinkles that rightly belonged there just trembling to find their places through the fantastically expensive *nu-skin* mask she had grafted on, had a narrowness about it that was accentuated by her sharp, inquisitive nose. Her brows were heavy for a woman, and her eyes were small, black and beady. But one

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thing about her was genuine—her diamonds—which she wore even at breakfast.

"Well?" he said, after sufficient pause for making these observations.

"What's the matter with you?" she asked, and then went on without waiting for a reply. "I think Doctor Pollard is right. He says that your injury has been too severe, that you will have to take things much easier from now on."

He knew what was coming. Through half-closed lids he watched her as she changed her expression to one of intimate wifely concern.

"Stanley, why don't you consider the change now? You certainly have a good reason—the assassin's shot, injury to your brain the drain on your system, doctor's orders and all that. Let Norman take over!" Behind the mask of concern there was a distant gleam, and Liddel knew what it was.

You stinker!—he thought. She stood to gain, personally, on many counts, by Norman's acquisition of power. Under his own regime, certain recognition was still given to a few old laws and traditions, in very special and isolated cases. One of these cases was royal land grants remaining to some of the monarchs of the world at the inception of World Federation. The present Queen of England, for example, still maintained title to certain castles, palaces and lands inherited from a long line of celebrated ancestors. This courtesy to Her Majesty by the World Federation (synonymous with Stan Liddel) had served to pacify millions of her former subjects and thus win the confidence and support of a powerful and highly representative cross-section of the world's population—for these more personally directed gestures were more effective than the most ingeniously conceived propaganda.

Well, Cecily had clashed with Her Majesty, because on one occasion in England when the two were being presented to each other a considerable amount of confusion arose over the question as to who was to bow to whom. Later, anti-Federation interests had bribed unofficial presses into printing some rather bold statements by Her Majesty to the effect that Cecily Liddel gave one the general impression of being something of a mule. When some lesser intellectual in England was quoted as explaining that Her Majesty's concept of a mule was that it was "a half-breed cousin to a jackass," Cecily had withdrawn rapidly to sharpen her claws.

As a consequence, the ensuing years had done nothing to endear the two opponents. Cecily swore then that she would have those castles and palaces and lands and use them as a "summer villa" for her poor relatives. And it so happened that Norman, her son, had an unsuspectedly large following of his own which was anti-British and would definitely seek to pull Her Britannic Majesty's ancestral props out from under her. At which time Cecily intended to swoop in for the kill.

Then there was the policy of population redistribution. One of the larg-

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est social rehabilitation camps in South America had ruined the environment of one of Cecily's favorite playgrounds, which was Montevideo. Under Norman, monies now invested in these centers would go to strengthening the World Federation Army and Navy and Air force. This would give Cecily an opportunity to recreate the old Montevideo she had known and bring all her old cronies back to the *Rio Plata*.

Finally, Cecily had heard increasingly insistent rumors to the effect that "good fellow" policy was going to have to be replaced by an iron fist. If not, the Liddels stood a chance of being violently uprooted. However, Norman had a powerful following, and they were impatient to get him into power. Inasmuch as Norman had gotten control of Propaganda his staff was one that held the cards when it came to public opinion. In fact, unknown to the senior Liddel, there had been a plot working to encourage his "good fellow" policy *because* of its danger to the Leader.

So when it came to Cecily Liddel and her vengefulness and selfishness and lust for power and wealth the world could go to pot as long as it could manage to satisfy her personal interests.

A LOT of little suspicions had been growing in Liddel's mind. They had not begun to integrate until just now. This was the third time in as many days that Cecily had urged him to regard his present situation as an opportunity for graceful withdrawal.

He felt all right, but Pollard recommended two more weeks of seclusion in his private section of the palace. This was innocent, on its surface, but when fitted in with other fragments a new mosaic took shape and design that he did not like. The remarkable infrequency of interruptions and petitions for special decisions, or for his signature— That was it! His signature! Only his personal signature could legalize the decisions of State! How were they doing without it?

And another thing—

He got to his feet, turned on his telecaster and positively saw his wife grow tense. Was it so unusual, his turning on the telecaster? He had done it as often as he had eaten his meals, yet now she watched him too intently.

The white band of light came on, spanning the table in front of his half-finished breakfast. Words raced across the band:

LATEST AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT REPORTS REVEAL THAT SOYA BEANS—

He snapped it off and glared at his wife. "Statistics!" he bellowed. "Here and in my bedroom I turn on the telecast and read about dedication ceremonies, educational programs—and statistics!" He came to her side of the table and impaled her with his eyes. "Where is the news!" he exclaimed rather than asked. "An assasin takes a shot at me. The search is still on. He has not yet been found. So what do I get but statistics? Now I'll tell you one little thing I've no-

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ticed about you, Cecily. Previously you were never much interested in the news unless it touched upon your personal interests. So why should you suddenly take such an avid interest in statistics? You have piled sugar bowls and napkin holders and—and everything you could find, in front of your own telecaster so that I wouldn't see it, and you have been watching it every day during my convalescence. Also there have been periods, during the busiest news hours, when your rooms have been closed. There is only one obvious answer. Both my telecasters and my television receivers have been receiving dummy programs created for my sole benefit!"

He snapped her telecaster on and waited for the white band to show, while she sat there in stony-faced silence. Then the telecast lines leaped at him:

TODAY'S QUOTA ONE THOUSAND AS STILLWATER REFUSES TO REVEAL ASSASSIN'S IDENTITY. TOMORROW TWO THOUSAND WILL BE EXECUTED.

He snapped the apparatus off and straightened up with a strange, happy smile on his face and a very deep, far-away look in his eyes. "The old Lidice method," he remarked, quietly. "Hm-m-m. So our little son Norman has taken over—"

Cecily Liddel knew that famous look and manner. It was the only thing she feared. Both her hands went over her mouth, and her eyes were wide as she got to her feet and watched him. The "happy" look on her husband's face was a reflection of the titanic calm accompanying his conviction that justice would be done—that what he willed to do would be accomplished in spite of all opposition.

"Stanley!" she cried out. "Be careful! Norman has taken full control—"

Liddel looked his wife up and down, a sad contempt curling his lips. "He is a misguided child!" he retorted. "But don't worry your serpentine little head about all this, Cecily dear. As usual, I shall handle the situation." Then his dynamic eyes concentrated on her and she was aware of something like a physical impact. "But I warn you! One false move out of you and you'll be a very sad woman. I know just how to appeal to you, Cecily. You are the fair weather type. You thought I was slipping and that your precious position of power was endangered. Well let me tell you that if you want to keep out of a hurricane you'd better stay on my side. Now do what I tell you and go to your rooms!—and you'd better hope I gain the upper hand! Just remember that a patricide is a parricide. Do you think Norman's move was a labor of love for his devoted mother? Your only defense now, Cecily, is me!"

He watched her hasty departure in mounting anger. Not so much because of the treacherous move his son had made as because of the methods he had used and was using now. Norman had done everything he could to encourage his father's policy of

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benevolence, realizing full well the dangers of it — that it would strengthen the courage of the opposition to strike at him. There were always fanatical or intellectual groups kicking up a resistance to his rule. What Norman had been waiting for was an attempted assassination. Perhaps he had even been disappointed that the assassin's bullet had not been successful! What he wanted was a chance to use the iron fist policy, to rouse the people to revolt, and then to "let them have it!" After millions died, then an unquestionable, unconditional dictatorship would be installed, of a much darker and undisguised brand than his own ride on the Tiger had made necessary. And in that darkness the thieves and pawns and the bribe-takers and assassins would emerge as of old, and the Iron Citadel would fall, leaving chaos, death, and a social retrogression into the Dark Ages.

Liddel clenched his fists. *That* was why Norman and all his tribe were children—idiots playing with matches in a giant powder house! He started with new, swift strides toward his bedroom, a subtle plan already forming in his mind. Then he stopped, staggered, and fell to his knees, eyes round with astonishment.

His head! The pain came in tidal waves. Pollard had warned him against excitement. Pollard! That was it! He needed Pollard. Pollard was a secretive devil—knew plenty. He'd start with him.

A male servant came running toward him and, as he fainted, he managed to say, "Pollard! Get Doctor Pollard!"

* * *

HE RAN, staggering over the quaking sands, dodging bodies, piles of equipment, flying debris. The bomb-flashes lit up the town like some giant, erratic stroboscope and he saw the chicken flying among the gables, the old woman beating the two men with her stick.

Then came the sound of the shells, and again the little glands under his ears and the cords in his neck tightened, brittle as glass. He saw the bridge made out of wood piling and railroad ties, and the dancing champagne bottle on a string.

By now he knew that to choose the bridge instead of the shell hole was the wrong way. He knew that shell number three would strike the bridge. Yet when it came he dove into its path as though he were a peg following the cam of Fate.

As his world split in half, he screamed in agony . . .

But now the pain was over and the ecstatic dream began, like a reward for all his sufferings. There was that dominant structure of marble on the flowered hill, that majestic, otherworld Parthenon, its soaring entablatures and its extensive colonnades gleaming in the bright summer's dawn.

And there was the girl again, running toward him down the blue path. There were her glad, sweet eyes that discerned only his own striding fig-

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ure in all that glorious panorama. There was the warmth of her arms flying around his neck, and he knew her lips that took the breath from him—

Ecstatic pain, and precious memory. The dream stopped where it always did.

But now—for the first time—came a new experience. A man's voice spoke to him as though out of an incalculable distance.

"Who are you?" it said.

As though he were without volition, he told the stranger who he was, unaware that he thought these things rather than spoke them. But thought came in word-ideation and he failed to realize that he was thinking in an alien tongue.

"What system is that?" asked the voice, at length.

"System! The World Federation system! What else could it be?"

"That is meaningless. Don't evade the question. State your astronomical position."

The mental voice was arrogant, as dynamic as Liddel's had ever been. There was a person he'd certainly like to—

Astronomical position!

"Good Lord, man!" His ejaculation was in English because untranslatable. "Your request indicates that you are—"

"Precisely. I am not in your solar system, wherever that may be, for the simple reason that I am traveling in interstellar space."

Liddel did not wonder if he were going mad. He was quite sure of it. Yet it was desperation that caused him to continue this weird, telepathic intercourse in an attempt to detect, if possible, some pattern of reason behind his experience.

"Then it is my turn to ask: Who are you?" he retorted, after a moment of stunned silence.

"I am Bartuzán of Gazye, Star Scout eight-seven over *che* one hundred, nine hundred second flotilla, Sairsian Fleet, of the Second Tirlanian Empire. I am two years out of Gazye, on hyper-drive, and am about ready to return before my course recorder loses track of where I came from all together. However, I was starting to make a quick routine check on a minor solar system in this region when I heard you scream and sob. What was all that for—and where are you? Describe your position."

To Liddel, most of this was utterly incomprehensible even though the individual word ideas were clear, for the most part. But the composite picture did not make sense. What was a star scout and a hyper-drive and a Tirlanian Empire? Was the man trying to tell him—

"I'll put the question this way," said the other. "How many planets are there in your solar system, how big is your sun, what type is it, how old, name its composition and approximate surface temperature and quanta intensity, what orbit are you, what are your satellites, if any, what is the mean planetary angle to the universal ecliptic and what is your system diameter. If you know its in-

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terstellar orbit and period or at least your absolute declension and ascension that would help very much . . . Surely you know that much! You are intelligent enough to reach me, telepathically, and to *cernrn* my own language." The word he used was untranslatable but seemed to carry the faintly graspable connotation of "extra-cognize."

Liddel tried to tell him. He knew plenty about certain branches of science but had always been weak in astronomy. So he made mistakes concerning the sun and the planetary sizes and descriptions. But he did mention nine planets. And then he wondered why he should go to all this trouble. What was this stranger's business? It sounded rather formidable, so he asked him.

"You *are* isolated!" came the other's reply. "For your information, the Tirlanian Empire rules the universe!"

He went on rapidly to inform Liddel. The First Tirlanian Empire had almost fallen because it had been content to follow the normal processes of growth and expansion without looking ahead to the day when some hidden culture in some part of the universe would rise with secret weapons and methods to challenge its position. With the firm establishment of the Second Tirlanian Empire, a new policy had developed. Tens of thousands of super-fast, far-traveling scout ships were sent into the farthest reaches of the universe to search out any world or system of worlds where any organized, intelligent society might conceivably constitute a threat to the Empire either in the present or during the next one thousand years. Any such sources of danger were promptly visited by Empire forces and the society in question was either duly prepared to become a useful part of the Empire, or it was destroyed—utterly.

It was then that the composite picture came to Liddel, and he recoiled. Here was the principle of Machiavellianism applied to all the worlds of the universe. Somewhere, somebody was doing the thinking for a people more numerous than the stars! Someone was the Prince, the Leader, depriving the whole Galaxy of the right to self-determination. Somewhere somebody was riding the greatest Tiger in Creation—because he was trying to play God . . .

And then the cold realization struck Liddel that this Star Scout with whom he was inexplicably *en rapport,* mentally at least, was one of the far-reaching tentacles of this incredible octopus of power. Was he on the verge of discovering Earth?

"What solar system are you investigating?" he asked.

"It is not yours," came Bartuzán's answer. "This one has twelve planets and is a second stage yellow at about fifty degrees *segnor.*" This last word evidently referred to a system of measurement for which Liddel's mind could find no parallel. "I believe, however, that there may be some inhabited planets here. My detectors show carbon, hydrogen, oxygen, nitrogen, helium—all the basics

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required. Perhaps some one of the inner, warmer planets –"

* * *

LIDDEL woke up and looked into the pensive, sagging countenance of his personal physician, Dr. Pollard. The latter was shaking his head.

"You should have followed my advice," he said to him. "The next time you get yourself all worked up may be your last time. Sometimes you act like a little boy."

"Do I? Sometimes I wish I were a little boy again—far from all this—this chaos. I wish I were back home now— Where was it?"

Dr. Pollard's face sagged a little farther. There was a peculiar, furtive expression in his pale-blue eyes. "Don't you remember?" he asked.

"Minnesota, I believe," answered Liddel. "There was a farm by a lake." It had always puzzled him why others could envision the scenes of their childhood whereas he could only remember verbal details concerning his, and then only vaguely, like a poem memorized long ago and half forgotten. Of course, his big injury at Caen had given him partial amnesia. That might be the reason, he thought.

Then he sat up in bed, abruptly. Norman! Norman had taken power and was swinging his iron fist at the world!

"Pollard!" he exclaimed, with narrowed eyes. "Do you know you are a traitor to the State?"

The other's mouth parted. His lower lip trembled for just one moment. Then his jaw clamped shut and he hardened. "You're still sick in your head," he grumbled.

"I never reasoned more clearly in my life!" he retorted. "You deliberately lied to me about the affairs of State, on Norman's orders, to keep me from knowing I was being betrayed!"

At that moment, Norman, himself, stepped smilingly to the foot of his bed, accompanied by two bodyguards whom Liddel had never seen. "Mother has informed me," he said, "That you have become aware of my program."

"*Pogrom* is the word!" bellowed Liddel. "Look at you! All decked out in a shiny black uniform, bemedaled, bespangled—for what! For a farce and deception, you cheap, tin Napoleon! What do you need those bodyguards in here for! You're just a cheap glorification of the old time gangster, always brave behind your triggermen! My son! My son! I won't ask you if you know what you are doing. I'll tell you—you *don't* know! If you don't let me help you correct the terrible error you have made, your course will lead you straight to destruction!"

Norman, who was as handsome as he was unprincipled, smiled and showed his bright, white teeth in a deliberate expression of mock enthusiasm. His eyebrows arched slightly and he cocked his head to one side, as though to see his father better.

"Are you really concerned for my

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personal destiny?" he asked. "I thought that with you only the world mattered."

"Don't worry!" retorted Liddel. "It certainly isn't your perfumed and pampered hide I'm thinking of now! I'm thinking of something that requires a global-historical perspective whereas you won't ever graduate beyond bullets, boudoirs and bromides! I want to talk to my Cabinet, and the Council and the Assembly, one after the other, today—now!"

Again, Norman smiled. "Really, father, you should take care of yourself. Doctor Pollard tells me that if you persist in exciting yourself you might suffer a fatal stroke. Now I suggest that he give you a sedative and that you just take it easy and stop worrying."

Liddel looked from his son to the implacable faces of the two guards. This was that ultimate *cul-de-sac* which all dictators must live to fear, whether tyrants or public benefactors. The sudden reality of it stood out in black and white, like that French town in his nightmare when the bombs burst all around him.

The sudden realization of his true position was like a bomb-shell. But he was not ready to take defeat. There was always a foxhole in which to survive the first barrage. And beyond that lay precious time and the possibility of counter-sabotage. Moreover, he was not forgetting his peculiar talent, his ability to influence people and even overwhelm them with the dynamic force of his personality. That was the main reason, he knew, why Norman sought to keep him in seclusion for the time being.

Pretending illness, Liddel passed a hand over his forehead, his face registering pain. "You are right," he said. "I am a sick man. Now is not my time, Norman. I must recuperate. Doctor Pollard," he added, "I want you to remain in the palace where I can call you at any moment. I have spells. I—" He slumped against his pillow, feigning weakness.

Dr. Pollard looked at Norman. The latter nodded approval and prepared to leave.

"Son," said Liddel, and the other paused, looking back. "You are massacring the populace of Stillwater in order to discover my assassin. The Lidice method won't work. It's a razor-edged boomerang. You'd better give it up!"

Norman's face colored darkly and he stiffened. "I don't care if I have to shoot every man, woman and child in the town—or in the whole state of Wisconsin!" he snapped. "The assassin must be found! He was identified as a citizen of Stillwater, and we know they are concealing him!"

Now Liddel smiled faintly. "Do not assume that I am so blind, or that the people are. You *want* to incite revolt. It's the old military principle of drawing enemy fire in order to locate their installations by the smoke. Once you know their location and the calibre of their weapons you'll stamp them out for good—or so you think. It is not out of respect for me that you seek this assassin—"

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"It is for neither reason," interrupted Norman, hotly. "I am after discipline. Stillwater, or a hundred Stillwaters, will be a small price to pay for the discipline of an entire world! The sooner the people learn obedience—"

He went on with an old refrain that Liddel knew was like a broken record, squawking and chattering and vainly repeating itself through the halls of History. He closed his eyes and tried not to listen to the tirade.

When Norman finally left, he was certain the guards had been posted in the corridor. But at least he had a slight advantage. Dr. Pollard was still at his bedside—and the room was soundproof . . .

AS Pollard busied himself with his medicine case, Liddel watched him closely.

Finally, he smiled and said, "You know, Doc, logic is like a crystal ball. It can give one a very definite picture of things to come."

Pollard Looked up at him intently, fully aware of the potentials of their situation, alone together in that specially constructed room — with so much of the past shared in common and so much of a personal nature that he had dared *not* share. In view of the political importance of his patient, in this moment of political crisis the room seemed to him to be electrically charged, its atmosphere ready to be rent by lightning bolts.

"For example," Liddel continued, "Norman's propaganda machinery must have prepared the world already for my death. To the people, I am a dying man, so sick that I am not to be disturbed by the well-wishers and the gift bringers and bearers of flowers. So if I should actually die, the event would have been foreseen as something more or less inevitable. Now we go to the second scene in the crystal ball. Norman fears what I might be able to do if I were to emerge—to convalesce completely. What would be more logical than for him to conceive of administering a *coup de grace,* to kill me now—for the good of the State, of course. And what better instrument could he use than my own personal physician, Doctor Henry Pollard? Just such a simple thing as an overdose of sedatives, perhaps—"

"You're still delirious," protested Pollard, though lamely. His face had turned deathly pale.

But Liddel pressed his advantage. "You are a weak man," he said, more dynamically now. "You are a prototype of historical villains—the Benedict Arnold brand, intellectuality outbalancing reason to the point where anything can be rationalized to satisfy one's own ambitions."

Pollard faced him squarely, angered, ready to have it out. "*What* ambitions?" he demanded. "I have done nothing all these years but guard your health. It was I who saved your life after your injury at Caen—" He paused, observing Liddel's wan smile and raised eyebrows.

"Yes?" queried the latter. "What about Caen? You know, Caen seems to be a recalcitrant old skeleton in

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your closet, Doc. And the strangest part of it is, you and Cecily seem to share that closet. Come now! You have the advantage over me. I could die by your hand and you'd end up getting a medal for it from Norman—or its equivalent. Surely the executioner can afford to reveal secrets to his victim, who need never live to tell!"

Small lines of bitter frustration deepened at the corners of Pollard's mouth. He glared at Liddel. "If it salves your vanity to play cat, go ahead!" he said, almost through his teeth. "But I am not the mouse. I am directed to kill you—so be careful of what you say!"

Liddel arched his brows a little higher. "So my crystal ball was right! So far so good. Now for Caen. Let's have it, Pollard. What is the truth? For instance, many an inadvertent remark made to be in the past by Cecily has given me a picture of a certain situation that existed between you two at the time of my injury. I think you were in love with her in those days. What happened?"

Pollard's mouth trembled. His eyes watered with emotion. "All right!" he blurted out. "We were secretly engaged at the time you came into the picture. I was the only one who grasped the truth concerning your case and I confided in Cecily. It was then that she conceived of certain plans which far exceeded her expectations."

"I suspect," said Liddel, "that the opportunity she foresaw evolved out of my amnesia. A lifetime of analyzing innuendos and attitudes on the part of both of you has already revealed much of this to me. You are no longer in love—either of you. Love could never be nurtured in the ground that you two were preparing. You sacrificed something that was honest and strong for the sake of some material goal which I believe to be connected with a misanthropic form of power and influence. You have become a very wealthy man, Pollard, on the basis of advantages which both Cecily and I have given you. Your outside private interests have mushroomed into a veritable empire of your own. Now if I should die, Cecily would no doubt marry you. That may be a definite plan between you. And then, as Norman's step-father—"

"I *am* his father!" Pollard's face was red, as though he were on the verge of apoplexy.

The words seemed to echo through the room, followed by a profound silence, while the two men stared at each other. Then Pollard broke. He sat down in a chair beside the bed and buried his face in his hands.

"I discovered that you could never have a child by Cecily—nor by any other woman in this world. I still loved her in those early years of her marriage to you. And since she had married you for practical purposes only she accepted my secret attentions."

While Pollard raved on, he failed to notice Liddel, who surreptitiously opened a secret compartment in one of the bedposts and gingerly extracted a ponderous-looking ring, which

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he slipped on his finger, face down. Then he closed the compartment and turned his full attention on the other. His face was drawn, almost haggard, his eyes cold.

"This, too, I have long suspected," he said. "But let's concentrate on the other phase of Caen. What were the secret details of my case? *What made Cecily foresee that I would become the dictator of the world?*"

Pollard looked up startled, his face twisted by fear and despair. "You are not human!" he exclaimed. "I mean—how could you know? She—she did not foresee that much, but she did know, and I agreed with her, that you were able to handle people any way you wanted. In you she saw more than security. She saw power!"

"Why? How? What was it you both knew about me?"

"It—it was all too obvious—what you were wearing, the objects found on the beach, and later on what they brought up out of the water. You were—"

"Yes?"

Pollard leaped to his feet, infuriated. "You fiend!" he shouted. "You've been hypnotizing me, making me tell secrets that—" He paused, looking about him in sudden desperation. When he discovered the waiting hypodermic needle he grasped it swiftly and plunged it into Liddel's unresisting arm. "That will shut you up!" he almost screamed. "For good!"

In that moment, Liddel reached out and grasped the other's wrist. As he did so, there was an audible "click!" —and Pollard jumped. He was too frightened to give voice to his sudden pain. He only stood there with the half-emptied hypodermic needle in his hand and looked at his bleeding wrist.

"Now Pollard," said Liddel, swiftly, "I want you to sit down and let's talk. There is no time to lose."

"What have you done!" cried Pollard, looking at his wrist.

"I am the Leader of the World Federation," replied Liddel. "Or at least I have occupied that position for some time. As such, don't you think I might have prepared myself for just such an eventuality as this? Certain classified secrets, secrets of war—State secrets too terrible for even esoteric consumption. This is a secret that is mine alone, because I killed the inventor for various highly justifiable reasons. Among these reasons was the fact that he had secretly experimented, fatally, on a number of human guinea pigs, and that he was a fanatic advocate of euthanasia, applicable to certain specified races of people. You have just become the victim of his lethal instrument—an unknown drug, my friend, not to be counteracted by an application of anti-biotics. Within a week, cancer will be raging in every part of your body. There is no cure except one, which must be applied in forty-eight hours if you are to be saved. And that cure is hidden—here!" He tapped his head. "So I would suggest that you administer to me an antidote to preserve my life. It all boils down to the simple, old-fashioned adage—an eye for an eye. My life is

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your life, and if I die, so do you!"

Pollard kept on looking from his bleeding wrist to Liddel's stern, set face. He seemed to be morbidly fascinated by the other's eyes. He kept looking at Liddel, finally, while he attended to his injury. Desperately, he sterilized it over and over again. He took out a scalpel and made deep incisions over the original wound, applying a suction pump. Then he looked into Liddel's eyes once more. With an audible grunt of terror, he dug into his kit, extracted a bottle, took out four tablets, spilling half the remainder on the floor, and swallowed them. He reached for a smaller hypodermic.

"It will do you no good," said Liddel, unsmilingly "The greatest experts in the world were incapable of saving those guinea pigs, some of whom were important political timber at the time. I'm growing drowsy, Pollard. Do we die together? At least my death will be the painless one, if you insist!"

Pollard jumped, his face a clay-colored composite of terrified suffering and wild frustration. "No!" he pleaded. "Don't let it happen to me! I can't die now, after all these years of waiting! A lifetime—Stanley! A lifetime—waiting to rule the world!"

"Oh, so you and Cecily have planed for Norman's demise, as well! I might have seen it in the crystal ball had I concentrated a little longer. Cecily is a nice sort of spider. Destroys her husband *and* her child! But come now! Drag your reason back into focus. My antidote, please. And then I will give you yours."

"But I only gave you half—which isn't lethal! The other half is still in the needle. You'll only sleep, Liddel. You'll wake up. I swear it!" Pollard blubbered, completely broken. "For the love of God, I'll do anything you say—just give me the antidote!"

"I will wait," said Liddel, "until I really wake up. Then we shall see, because in the meantime—" He shook his head, groggily. "You must perform certain duties—and to the letter! Otherwise you still die!"

"What do you want me to do!" Pollard exclaimed, breathlessly. "I'll do anything—anything!"

"Who of the old school are left?" Liddel asked him. "Naturally, Norman must have purged the higher echelon of my apparent supporters."

"None!" cried Pollard, miserably. "Every man who openly supported you is dead!"

"Good! Every man who openly supported me was a fair-weather friend. I protected my real supporters by insisting that they should pose as my enemies—like Schuster and Templeton and Gates. What of them—and Staggs?"

Pollard stared, stupidly, his mouth widely agape. "They are—the new Cabinet!"

"You see?" smiled Liddel, sleepily. "All is not lost. One more question. When is the next Assembly?"

"Tomorrow afternoon at two. It's to be a universal telecast, and Norman was to announce your death . . ."

"Never mind that. Go to Staggs. Make sure nobody overhears you.

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Just say to him you have a message for him from me, to be effective at the time the Assembly convenes. Just say: *'Tiger! Tiger! burning bright, In the forests of the night—'*[1] He'll know the rest. Then pray that I live, Pollard. That is your only chance for survival!"

"Yes! I'll do it! I promise! Here, take this benzadrine! It will reduce the effect of the sedative! You will sleep now, but not for long . . ."

Unknown to either of them, the room concealed a tiny microphone, long since established behind the wallpaper. The conversation thus overheard caused the listener to lie awake all night staring at the ceiling —because there were some very weighty pros and cons to be considered. Stanley Liddel was still a resourceful and powerful leader of men.

And yet, the fruits of power could not be enjoyed vicariously . . .

* * *

LIDDEL slept deeply at first, but as the benzadrine began to produce its counter-effect he finally slept lightly enough to dream. However, there was no nightmare of bombs and a dying town and a bridge, nor was there a dream of a blue path in the meadowlands down which his "lost Lenore" came running. Instead, he dreamed about Bartuzán of Gazye, Star Scout of the Sairsian Fleet.

He dreamed that Bartuzán returned to the Second Tirlanian Empire, which consisted of hundreds of solar systems covering twenty thousand light years of space. He was aware of other scout ships, as numerous as ants, crawling across the star-coral of the seas of space, and of destroyers and ponderous battleships of the void that traveled about in veritable clouds, hungrily scouring the endlessness like so many tiger sharks, ready to blast worlds from their orbits if necessary in order to stamp the totality of intelligent life forms in the universe with the flaming brand of tyranny.

He dreamed the Bartuzán reported the existence of Earth to his chieftains, and that ten years later a great battlefleet came down upon New York and the other metropoli of the globe and conquered the World Federation in one night. Men with glistening metallic-mesh harness and burnished, plumed helmets and strange paralyzing weapons walked down Main Street of every major city, and after that it was forever too late for freedom. Forever too late . . . *Forever!*

Liddel stirred uncomfortably in his troubled sleep, and he perspired. If it were only not forever! Ordinary dictators generally had a Messiah complex, believing they were actually born to bring a great gift to the world, that the tyrannical measures they used were only a means to an end—an end which would be a Utopia of prosperity and freedom one day.

But slavery forever! This cut deeply into the solar plexus of racial instinct. There was a blind, stubborn

[1] From "The Tiger," a famous poem by William Blake, contained in his *Songs of Experience* (1794)—Ed.

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animal who roared at all bars, traps and confinement. The human animal, in the long run, had to be free.

Free to expand, from finite to infinite! That was the answer to the question he had asked himself on the balcony overlooking the multitude when he had been shot. Man's purpose was to progress, in freedom and forever, expanding with eternal growth, like the smallest seeds in the ground or like the immensurable galaxies of Creation, from finite unto infinite. It was all a part of the mighty surge of existence, a part of the reverberating symphony of the spheres, the vibration that was energy, the energy that was matter. It was the Law of Being!

Freedom. Self-determination. The divine right to utilize the miracle of the mind with that individuality of purpose and desire which begat originality and invention—not the mass constriction into a mold that would but reflect the single philosophy of one man or of one privileged group. For the latter process was retrogression from infinite to finite and, by the inevitable laws of nature, it led only to stagnation and even non-existence. In the freedom of individual striving toward the infinite was there strength. All else was folly—riding the Tiger to hell.

In semi-wakefulness, but with his eyes still closed, Liddel made actual contact once more with Bartuzán, himself . . .

"I have been wanting to contact you," said Bartuzán. "I have made a rather interesting discovery. In this moment I am circling a fair-sized planet, the only one in this sola system that bears a high form of intelligent life. In ten thousand light years of travel I have not discovered a civilization worthy of our attention—but this one is large and technologically advanced. Electricity, electronics, aviation — even rockets! — although they are crude and incapable of reaching outer space as yet. But here are very powerful potentialities, and surely in far less than a thousand years—in a hundred years—they will constitute quite a nest of resistance. In a thousand years they should have conquered other solar systems in this far frontier of the Galaxy and established a force of arms capable of giving us plenty of trouble! And to think that I was on the verge of returning to Gazye!"

Liddel was visited by a vague, growing alarm. Something familiar about Bartuzán's description bothered him. Surely this Star Scout from a galactic empire could not be hovering over the Earth! No! He had said the solar system he was visting possessed twelve planets. But what was to prevent the system of Sol from having three planets which were as yet unknown to Terrestrial astronomers!

Liddel sat bolt upright in bed. It was night and his room was dark, so dark that he might have been blind, or in the depths of space. As the presentiment of racial disaster and eternal enslavement evolved into a real fixation, he was aware of a prickly heat consuming him. He was awake, trying to see the ceiling—trying to

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see the sky and outer space where a sleek, swift scoutship circled the world, its lone pilot observing it with apathetic eyes, in cold, dutiful allegiance to a vast, sprawling enemy who could perhaps even annihilate the entire solar system by deflecting a single lever!

Too late for freedom . . . *Forever!*

Desperately, he sought conscious contact with Bartuzán. He called aloud in the darkness, but to no avail. The silence in that soundproof room seemed to ring. In his tortured mind he was reminded of distant and mournful sirens—air raid sirens presaging Armageddon.

He tried again to sleep in an effort to make contact with Bartuzán, but the benzadrine defeated his purpose. Instead, he lay awake until morning found him, haggard but armed with a plan of action . . .

* * *

EVIDENTLY Dr. Pollard was so terrified at the prospect of the veritable chain reaction his message to Anton Staggs was going to produce that even his horror of slow, lingering death could be conquered momentarily. He refrained from seeing Liddel that morning, but he sent him a sealed message via an assistant doctor. The man came early and waited for an answer. The message read:

Your Excellency:

Please forgive my indisposition this morning. It seems I am coming down with an ailment which has so far defied my efforts to check.

However, in regard to yourself, I should advise complete relaxation this morning. That is, stay in bed and try to realize that you are a very sick man—at least until after noon.

I wish at this time to remind your Excellency that you once promised me a copy of certain research papers in relation to cancer. A very close colleague of mine is currently engaged in a very pressing problem pertaining to that dreaded malady, and he has been depending on the notes you said you had in your possession. Would you kindly send them along with Dr. Holmes, who is the bearer of this message?

I should appreciate your fulfilling this promise to me, and in the meantime I wish you success in your recovery, although you are going to have to be extremely careful!

Your faithful servant.

Henry Pollard

P.S. I visited the patient you directed me to examine, and I find him to be responding to the prescribed treatment as expected.

Liddel found it difficult to suppress a broad grin. Pollard had planted a bomb and was steering clear of the palace for the rest of the day. Anton Staggs was the fuse. *"Tiger! Tiger! burning bright—"* It would reach the powder before this day was done. Secret messages were probably flying already. Loyal supporters were getting ready to slough off their disguises and take over strategic control points, arsenals, communications centers. Many of his own men would be

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right there in the Assembly, and the Cabinet was *all* his!

Pollard reminded him that he must pretend he was sick and dying, "at least until after noon.' And he was also pleading with him for the promised cure. Liddel looked up at Dr. Holmes, a pale-faced, bespectacled young man who was obviously overwhelmed by being in his presence.

"Tell Doctor Pollard," he said, "that I will not be able to send him the papers he wanted until I have gotten on my feet—perhaps tomorrow, when I am *sure* that I am on the road to recovery."

He gave the other his famous, dynamic stare, and the messenger departed in haste, almost walking through the door in the process. A guard reached in to close the door after him, and as he did so he gave Liddel a very searching inspection. For his benefit, Liddel lay on his pillow, groaned miserably, and feebly passed a hand over his brow.

The guard smiled knowingly and closed the door quietly . . .

All morning long, Liddel lay in his bed, thinking and planning, following this line of probability and that. He knew that if Plan Tiger worked, by two o'clock Norman's guards in the palace would be overthrown and an armed escort belonging to his own faction would come for him. He planned to get up at one P.M. and shower, shave and dress, in full regalia, preparatory to making his calculatedly dramatic appearance before the Assembly and before the eyes of the world, via television.

But a host of details bothered him. Uncertain factors like Cecily, for instance. He prayed that Pollard, out of fear for his own skin, had taken charge of her, if possible. He called her on the palace inter-communication system, using the private conversation key that connected him with her bedroom, but no one answered. Perhaps, then, she *was* with Pollard.

But then again, those two were capable of cooking up a witches' brew between them, under the circumstances. The only saving feature was, he had Pollard's life as security against treachery from that direction. He congratulated himself over the fact that he had not yet given him the prescription for counteracting the deadly drug. He could use every available safety factor now.

And then, above all, there was Bartuzán and the threat of the Tirlanian Empire. He reviewed in his mind again the clues which had led him to suspect that it was Earth the alien had discovered. Between the possible clues were several gaps. For example, Bartuzán had mentioned his discovery of crude rockets, incapable of penetrating into outer space. If he were so devilishly observant, and it was Earth he was looking at, why hadn't he noticed the space station—and the air domes of the two lunar observatories?

He wished fervently that there were sufficient time and that he could take the risk of getting a connection through to Schenectady and the space phone station. But perhaps tomorrow would be much better. He would have

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both the Earthside lunar observatory and the space station scour space for signs of that ominous scoutship. If it could be captured somehow, a study of its operating principle and weapons might advance Terrestrial humanity out of the handicapped stage, and in a thousand years they might be ready to defend themselves . . .

BY ONE O'CLOCK, Liddel had gotten out of bed and started his preparations. He turned on an amplifying system which brought to his room the sounds of various strategic locations inside the palace. All was relatively quiet, very typical of the ominous calm preceding the storm. There was a grim smile on his lips as he went to his shower.

Approximately at one-thirty, he was half dressed and shaving when he finally heard the expected sound of machine gun and rifle fire. He heard men shouting, scuffling and swearing. Alarm sirens started to wail but were soon silenced. Liddel hurried into the rest of his uniform.

He had just pocketed a small vial of gleaming, yellow tablets when the door of his room opened quietly and six men in regulation Army uniform stepped in to salute him. He came gracefully to attention and returned the double salute with pleasure. He knew that his old stance and powerful personality had returned to him, and that the soldiers knew it.

"Compliments of Cabinet Chief Schuster, your excellency! You are expected at once in the Assembly!"

Straightening himself fully, squaring his still board shoulders, and with chin confidently high, Liddel, the splendidly uniformed Leader of World Federation, stepped forward and joined his bodyguards. But he thought, as his shining boots echoed along the marble corridors — *How come Schuster? I thought Staggs was Cabinet Chief?*

Well, perhaps he was too busy afield and Schuster was acting Cabinet Chief. Staggs would be well occupied this day, *outside* the palace! This television broadcast had to get through to the people!

The Assembly room was what might have been expected of any conference chamber where the representatives of a vast government sat in conference. There was the half moon section consisting of tier upon tier of tables and benches rising gradually toward the peristyled periphery of the domed chamber, under excellent indirect lighting from above the colonnades. The scintillating crystal chandelier in the center of the dome was merely a romantic architectural anachronism, completely non-functional. In front of the Assembly tables was a smaller, oblong section consisting of eight desks for members of the Cabinet. Above these was a platform reserved for top echelon officers of the State, and at the very top and front of the chamber, under a fan of flags and heavily symbolic banners, was the Leader's rostrum, plus standing or sitting room, as the case might be, for bodyguards or diplomatic guests.

The Assembly benches were filled

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to overflowing, and four old friends of Liddel sat at the Cabinet desks—Templeton, Gates, good old gray-bearded Geijerstam with his formidable meerschaum, and that irrepressible scholar and fighter, diminutive Dr. Paradowski. At the Leader's rostrum, in front of a bristling forest of microphones and under a gleaming battery of television lights, bald-headed Herman Schuster awaited him anxiously. On the official platform below the rostrum, surrounded by military police, sat a very disgruntled looking deposed dictator. "Norman the Conqueror!"—Liddel mused, triumphantly.

As he stepped to the rostrum and was officially introduced by Schuster, the Cabinet and at least fifty percent of the Assembly rose up and cheered loud enough to rattle the chandelier. There were others in the Assembly who sat there stonily and glowered at him in sullen disdain. With the exception of a few television cameras up in the public galleries over the colonnades on either side of the chamber, Liddel saw there only the uniforms of loyal Army units, as well as the ominous gleam of machine guns. Plan Tiger, he reflected, had apparently worked out to a grim and absolute perfection.

"Where is Staggs?" he asked Schuster, in a low tone that was inaudible to the microphones.

Schuster returned him a worried look. "No word," he said. "All is not a bowl of cherries yet, Stan. This is our supreme opportunity. You're on the air, so give 'em all you've got! Only *you* can do it!—or God help us all!"

Schuster did not wish to subject his Leader to distracting preoccupations at this precarious moment, so he clamped his mouth shut on a torrent of growing fears he might have expressed. For one thing, Plan Tiger had worked out too easily and too well! He was thankful for Liddel's presence, for the unpredictable man was far from helpless when it came to emergencies.

As Liddel placed both hands on the rostrum and faced his audiences squarely, eyeing the world with that deep-eyed glare that had influenced a generation of human history, the Assembly shushed itself to waiting silence, while television cameramen on the floor and in the galleries nervously adjusted their telephoto lenses . . .

AFTER the calculated pause for effect, he began, as dynamically as it was possible for him to express himself:

"Members of the Cabinet, Assemblymen, citizens of the World Federation—and in that latter all important category I am most certainly including each and every member of the World Federation Army, Navy and Airforce—"

He got this far when pain shot through his head, causing him to feel faint. It was the bullet wound. He was not supposed to excite himself, yet this was the most exciting and nerve-wracking moment of his life. If not for his own sake, he *had* to go on

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now for the sake of al' those loyal friends whose lives were being gambled on his ability to make a comeback, and for humanity at large, which stood at the crossroads that would take them to recovery or to ultimate destruction. Moreover, he had to warn them of extr -terrestrial dangers—the keynote of his speech.

A slight murmuring arose from the Assembly as many noticed his sudden loss of color and the new, desperate grip he took on the rostrum. But he strove to ignore the pains that half blurred his vision.

"Have you ever found yourselves in such a dangerous position that you considered that particular moment or situation to be the most critical and decisive point in your existence?" Pains plunged through his brain like suffocating tidal waves and the alternate blurring of his vision made him dizzy. He began to sweat and feel nauseated, but he went on. "Surely this has happened, at one time or another, to most of you. And you have no doubt assured yourselves that *if* you survived that perilous situation you would be much wiser in the future, capable of foreseeing the pitfall, and self-confident and strong enough to come through any adversity, however severe."

The pain abated sufficiently for him to glare at his multiple audience. "Such is the *present* situation—for *all* of us—here, today, *now!*" Before the rising tumult in the Assembly could get out of hand he went on, in a precious moment of lucidity. "Take the politics out of it!" he shouted. "What I have to say is too important for any individual considerations of advantage. What I am getting at cuts deep beneath the surface *fat* of objective detail—it probes into the subjective heart of human instinct because it touches upon three prime questions: Man's basic purpose—freedom versus slavery—and the survival of our race. These things must be discussed *now*, because we have all been violating Man's prime *raison d'être*, you have been selling your divine rights to freedom, and in this very moment every human being on this planet is being threatened with annihilation!"

The resultant uproar was to be expected. Half the Assembly was on its feet, shouting. Military police tensed, weapons in hand. Schuster, standing beside him, looked alternately worried, puzzled, and hopeful. Was this disastrously maudlin sincerity a startling revelation of secret fact or masterful subterfuge? This latter possibility gave Schuster and other supporters courage, after a fluttery moment of doubt. Norman, on the platform below, turned about to stare at his step-father in curious amazement. A guard leaned over and spoke to him, and he was seen to shake his head, negatively. Most television men were busy panning the scene, but one telephoto lens held steadily on Liddel's pale, heavy-browed face, while another began to concentrate on Norman's platform.

The interruption provided Liddel with a moment of respite in which to quiet his nerves and try to avoid the

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dizzying pains in his head. But the pains gave no promise of abating, and now, along with the alternate blurring and lucidity of his vision came a similar effect in his consciousness. In the troughs of mental darkness he heard the voice of Bartuzán.

"Strange that I am cognizant of what you are saying now," he said, "because you are obviously addressing others. But the closer I come to the surface of this planet the better contact we seem to make. This must be *your* planet, after all. You must be unaware of three small planets swinging in widely eccentric reverse orbits at angles violently opposed to the solar ecliptic. Your system consists of twelve planets, my friend . . ."

For a moment, Liddel was aware of the Assembly chamber, with all the faces of the people there staring at him, and then another wave of darkness brought him the voice of the man from Gazye again.

"If you hear me, don't let me interrupt you. I will merely remark that I am descending over a broad channel of water which connects one sea with another. To the North is a minor continent and to the South is a very broad continental peninsula. It is that greater land mass which I am approaching. Does my description bring to your mind any familiar location?"

Lord yes!—thought Liddel. Who had lived through the old battle of Normandie without being able to recognize a description of the English Channel—and France, the anchor of the Iberian Peninsula? The star scout was landing somewhere along the coast of France! But one lone scout could do nothing more than observe and protect himself against discovery—though he was foolish to reveal as much as his position as he had already. There was time yet, after his speech, to order his capture. He must never be permitted to return whence he came!

The darkness passed, and Liddel was aware again of the Assembly, which now waited for him to continue. . . .

"The chief cause of argument," he began again, "is that the contenders have separate premises on which to base their reasoning, and therefore all argument, as such, is basically illogical. The only really logical course is for all sides to begin from one premise that is universally acceptable—one common denominator of opinion—and then to determine if ensuing courses of action are in harmony with that basic agreement. For example, the action adopted by the world at large in the immediate future should be in keeping with such a fundamental as Man's purpose, or whether he should enjoy the right to self-determination."

Thus Liddel went on, at first puzzling his audience as to his own purpose and then amazing them with the revelation that they could take his statements at face value. There *was* no subterfuge, after all! Schuster had chills, Templeton and Gates looked at Geijerstam, who sadly shook his head. And Paradowski narrowed his eyes while he concentrated on Liddel,

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appreciating his premises but despairing the inevitable result of such imprudence. A world Leader *had* to ride his Tiger. He *had* to be a politician. And to politicians, naked truths were tantamount to *hari-kari!* Behind his thick-lensed spectacles, Paradowski wept. And a derisive smile appeared on Norman's face as he winked at his guard.

As if reading their minds, Liddel continued. "I speak to you now *not* as a politician, but as a statesman. Between the two there is a diametrically opposed difference. A politician uses the people in the interests of self; a statesman dedicates self to the interests of the people . . . " He looked at the television cameras while pain brought rivulets of sweat to his face. "I stand before you today solely as a statesman, because I am risking my life, my friends' lives, and *our* sacred honor, to bring you the only truths that can save you now . . . "

And so it went on, through wild reaction and stunned silence, while Liddel explained that Man's only purpose could be his self-determined but cooperative struggle from finite to infinite, and that dictatorship was an exact reversal of the true process of natural Law, in that it brought Man downward from infinite to finite, unto ethnic atrophy. Therefore, come what might, the world would have to fight its **own** way through to a universal system of representative government which would still guarantee the realization of the old "social alchemist's" dream, which was life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

"I stress universalism," he continued, getting to his climax, "because you are going to have to learn that nationalisms belong to that past which was emerging from darkness out of savage superstition and necessary regional collectivism. The opposite perspective is globalism—even cosmic perspective. You are not Americans and Russians and Germans and Frenchmen and Englishmen, nor are you primarily white, yellow, red, brown or black. You are Earthmen—Terrestrials. Your Creator made the world. He did not make nations. You are one, and you are going to have to stand as one—for you have enemies from beyond the skies, in fact, from beyond this solar system. *And one of them is among us today . . . !*"

LIDDEL knew this was a bombshell, but he did not expect it to precipitate a chain reaction. In the midst of incredulous exclamations and shouts of alarm, Norman came to his feet, and one of the guards handed him a microphone. At the same time the troops in the galleries trained their guns on the Assembly floor.

They were Norman's men!

Schuster, Templeton, Gates, Geijerstam, Parodowski and all other supporters of the old regime looked, white-faced, at Liddel. They saw him extract a small vial from his pocket and take out a gleaming yellow tablet. This he swallowed with expressionless calm.

In amazement, Schuster whispered "Good God, Stan! You foresaw this trap and I did not—although I feared

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we were in danger. Is *that* your answer now?" He pointed to the vial which Liddel was just pocketing again.

Out of the corner of his mouth, Liddel said, "This isn't suicide, Herman. I'm not through yet! Stand by!"

And Schuster stood by for the simple reason that there was no alternative. . . .

"If everyone will remain exactly where he is," Norman announced, confidently, "no one will get hurt. This insidious plot to overthrow the State was discovered in time for loyal forces of the government to intercept all implementations of the scheme. A pretense was made to give the impression that the revolutionaries had won and that the speech you have just heard was televised—in order to allow Stanley Liddel, the author of this treason, to incriminate himself completely, which he has most surely done!"

Liddel stared at the television cameras, whose operators now worked with guns in their ribs, actually televising for the first time. They had been forced into the act! He thought of Staggs, who was probably dead or languishing, half dead from torture, in some prison cell—and of all those who had intended to take over the communications centers. Surprised in ambush!

Betrayed by whom? Surely Pollard would not have dared. But Cecily would have—if she had discovered the plan in time. Maybe Pollard had lost control completely and gone crying to her in his consternation. That was why he had feared to face him personally and had sent a messenger, pleading for his promised cure!

Damn his soul! He could die in hell before he'd get it now!

" . . . and furthermore," Norman was saying, "I shall prove to you that this dreaded, inhuman menace from the stars who threatens us all, and who has sought maliciously to mold the world into a pattern of his own devising all these years—is none other than Stanley Liddel, himself—who is, I assure you, *not* my real father—nor could he ever be the father of any child born of woman!"

Liddel was only vaguely aware of what went on after that. A roaring tumult, even gunfire and bloodshed on the Assembly floor—and Norman shouting at the world the details of the most amazing story ever told.

First came Cecily, rigid, pale, desperately determined to salvage all she could of her world by stepping on his own head—and Pollard, under guard. Pollard, who alternately screamed his innocence at Liddel—pleading for his cure now, before it was too late—and confessed what they wanted him to, under threat of immediate execution right there on the Assembly floor.

On Cecily's part, it was clever salvaging. Liddel had controlled her mind, subjecting her to a degrading Trilby-Svengali relationship, forcing her to marry him as a front and disguise to cover his true identity, after she had already married Pollard.

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Liddel knew that part to be a lie, although he was aware of the other arresting clues concerning the mystery of his injury at Caen. Amnesia, and a superimposed false memory of a childhood in Minnesota. Pollard had achieved that part! What was it Pollard had said to him last night?—"It was all too obvious—what you were wearing, the objects found on the beach, and later on what they brought up out of the water . . . "

Good God! Was he, then, actually an extra-terrestrial? Could he even be a predecessor of Bartuzán's, an earlier star scout of the Tirlanian Empire, who had been caught in the battle of Normandie and injured—afflicted with amnesia? Could this explain his unprecedented power of personality? His head whirled darkly, nauseatingly.

The yellow pill was taking effect in his nervous system, protecting him against what was to come. Each nerve channel felt like a rivulet of ice, and he shivered, involuntarily.

Pollard was gibbering now, about how Liddel had been brought in to the hospital late at night, by Medical Corps men who later died on the battlefield and never lived to tell their secret. He even exhibited a metal-mesh harness and a glass-like helmet with oxygen devices on it. Something about electrolysis of ocean water. He had come up out of the sea . . .

The real shock came when they brought in Anton Staggs . . .

He was bloodied, all right, with his hands tied behind him and his clothes half torn from his body. But his bruised and swollen eyes sought out Liddel and his cracked lips worked into the caricature of a loyal smile.

"Yes," he told the world, over the microphones, "I—I was in on the secret, too, but for another reason. The world needed this powerful mind. If he believed he was one of us, we had a chance of turning a potential enemy into a valuable ally and capable leader at a time when there was none among us to do the job. But Stanley Liddel has proved my theory to be erroneous. To follow an outside leader was wrong. The world should not depend on the strength of a few individuals to pull it through. God alone is leader, and Man must not play God! Liddel has told the truth! Man's only purpose is a self-determined but cooperative struggle, from finite unto—"

"Shut up!" Norman told him. Get to the point! What are the further proofs of this case?"

Again in a daze, Liddel heard how the U. S. Navy had located a ship on the seabottom off the French coast and had mistaken it for an enemy submarine. They had depth-bombed it and left it there. But years later, Staggs' salvage company had brought it up, a battered, almost unrecognizable thing covered with seaweed. Then Pollard had come to him, taking him in on the secret and introducing him to the star man who thought he had been born on Earth.

"But he has committed no crime!" protested Staggs, before he was struck senseless with a black-jack by

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one of his guards.

"No crime, he says!" shouted Norman, pointing an accusing finger at the rostrum. "*There* stands the secret agent of an alien, inhuman power which threatens us from the very stars! There stands the most evil and dangerous spy our history has ever known! Do you think for one minute he suffered amnesia? He played right into their little plot because no greater opportunity could have been offered him than to be ruler of the people whose enslavement he has been preparing for years!"

Schuster, still faithful in spite of it all, shouted at Liddel above the tumult, "Run for it! They'll kill you now!"

But Liddel stood there as though in a deep trance, staring into emptiness, a look of wondering revelation on his face.

The blue path—and the girl! Surely that was a true memory *vision* rather than a synthetic impression!—not like his supposed childhood in Minnesota! Somewhere out among the distant stars of space, that loved one lived! She was real! And if he could believe what he had seen so often in her eyes, her arms still waited for him alone!

Only thirty years had passed since Caen. And somewhere in France was a star ship piloted by Bartuzán. Perhaps—

"Stan!" cried Schuster. "They're coming for you!"

Norman stood there laughing at him, his white teeth glistening in the television lights, while half the members of the Assembly swarmed down the tiers, crowding toward the rostrum.

There were cries of "Get him!" "Shoot him." "What are we waiting for?"

At which point Liddel finally acted. . . .

YEARS before, he had designed that rostrum, himself, as well as the chandelier, and since then no one had discovered his secret. Now his searching hands, groping beneath the rostrum, found two tiny projections. One had to be pressed before the other would operate. Then the top of the rostrum flew up, becoming a bullet-proof shield, and beneath it was a small control board.

"Shoot him down!" roared Norman, extracting his own automatic and starting to run to a point of vantage.

Machine guns began to chatter, from the side galleries.

But in another moment a deathly stillness settled upon the chamber. Men fell, staring blindly, paralyzed—including Norman and Schuster, foe as well as friend.

Liddel alone maintained voluntary control of his faculties, because the yellow pill had done its work, giving his nervous system temporary immunity against the supersonics now emanating in all directions from the chandelier. But the pill did nothing to alleviate the overwhelming pains in his head, or the pain of fresh bullet wounds from the machine gun fire—in his shoulder, his leg, and some-

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where in his side. Perhaps it had passed all the way through him, the region was too numb for him to tell. And there lay Schuster at his feet, riddled by the lateral fire from the galleries.

Too late for Schuster. Too late for his own freedom. Too late now for any possibility of finding Bartuzán or taking the lofty star road to distant Gazye and the blue path on the hill. He only had minutes to live.

But perhaps it was not yet too late for some of those friends who had been loyal . . .

Struggling against pain and increasing weakness, he went to where Paradowski lay across his desk, staring vacantly out of tear-stained eyes. He went to him because he was the quickest mind, the most redoubtable fighter—and the lightest to carry. In spite of Paradowski's slight hundred and thirty pounds, it was Liddel's maximum effort to drag him back to the rostrum. There he manipulated another control, and the entire rostrum pivoted, disclosing a narrow spiral stairway leading downward.

Far below, in the dim passageway that ran beneath the basements of the palace, out of range of the supersonics, Paradowski revived, and Liddel gave him the yellow pills and told him what to do. He must go back and get the others and revive them, too—Templeton, Gates, Geijerstam, Staggs. The passage would lead them to freedom. Only a precarious freedom, perhaps—a shallow toehold from which they would have to carve the future freedom of the world.

He wanted to warn Paradowski then about Bartuzán, but he fainted. And Paradowski lost no time in trying to revive him. Liddel's blood was fast draining. There were others of the old school whose lives might still be saved. . . .

"BARTUZAN!"

Liddel's mind called out in the gathering darkness, in that last borderland of delirious dreaming that lies between life and death.

"Bartuzán!"

"I hear you," came the reply. "I heard your speech—most of it." His thoughts came hurriedly, tensely. "It was tremendous. I sat there in the ship, on the seabottom, absorbing what you said—before going ashore."

"Ashore! Where, ashore?"

"How should I know? I can't answer you. War is all around me. Bombs bursting. I must seek shelter."

War? What war? Was the revolution on the outside, even in France?

France! Normandie! *Caen!*

Rockets, Bartuzán had said. Crude rockets, incapable of penetrating into space. No sign of a space station or lunar observatories. No—*not in those days!*

Liddel whirled in a Mäelstrom of incredible thoughts, caught up in a welter of inconceivable revelations, his past and all the mystery of Caen crashing together in a shock wave that jarred his mind momentarily into perception that was more vivid than the light of noon.

"Bartuzán!" he called. "You must

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answer! Is it night, and is there a town?"

"Crazy creature!" he heard Bartuzán's answering thought. "Fluttering around over the roofs."

"And the old woman beating at the men with a stick!"

"Yes! Yes! But how do you know —That shell! The one from the sea! What a terrible sound!"

"There is a shell-hole near you!" screamed Liddel's dying mind. "And a bridge! Do you see the bridge?"

"Shell-hole? Yes—some men in it! There's another shell from the sea! It has blown up a part of the town!"

"But the bridge! Quick! Do you see it?"

"Yes—a silly flask of some kind hanging by a string, dancing in the percussion blasts. I must get under that bridge. The third shell—"

"No!" screamed Liddel, audibly. "Not the bridge! The shell-hole! *Not the bridge!*"

* * *

IT WAS early morning. The first and smallest of the triple suns of Gazye had risen, casting a cool, dawn's twilight across the green, rolling hills and the headlands, gently turning the motionless ribbon of surf from phosphorescent blue to ghostly white, outlining its distant, winding course to the brightening horizon.

And Bartuzán was home once more, home from the lonely journeys into the far, cold depths of endlessness and longing, home to see the girl whose memory had been a saving elixir to him in the strange and distant oceans of the universe. The world still slept, awaiting the official sign of day, which would be the second sun, already reddening the morning skies around the little silvery Sun of the Dawn. But far up on the hill, there below the Imperial Viceroy's palace, *she* came running along their precious path.

He was young and strong and tingling with life, striding up the still faintly glowing crystal footway toward her. The whispering wind from the ocean caressed his back, and he heard the gold-plumed *rin-a-lon* singing in the flowering meadowlands round him. Far ahead on the vast terraces below the palace, in the garden pergolas, he heard the muted music of the harp trellises responding to the sighing voice of the sea.

She was nearer to him now, and he ran toward her with a gladness that could not be contained. With her arms outstretched and her white robe and her raven hair flying, she came swiftly into his arms. He sought her lips and looked into her eyes—her love the only sure reality that he could find in this sprawling empire of tyranny.

"Bartuzán!" she cried, ecstatically pressing her head against his chest and hugging him. "At last! At last, beloved!"

IN SPITE of tyranny and a life circumscribed by arbitrary regulation, Bartuzán and Alee lived a relatively normal life, though in return for favor and high position he had to serve her father, the Viceroy of

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Gazye, in the interests of the vast Tirlanian Government. There were many other journeys, both as a scout and as a captain, and finally as Admiral of the Sairsian Fleet, engaging in mighty battles against lesser tyrannical worlds which had to be forced into the yoke of Empire.

But there was always one little secret which he shared alone with Alee. Far out in the frontier wilderness of unknown stars, where possibly no scout would penetrate again for a thousand years, he had found a lonely, inhabited world in an otherwise lifeless solar system.

It had been one discovery he had never reported, which was treason, of course. But who could try him if his story remained untold, except to Alee? And she, he knew could never betray him, because she had responded even more than he to the lesson which that unknown world had given him in some mysterious way, as though an occult spell had been cast upon him. In fact, its strange and thrilling lesson was taught to their children—that men should be free to govern themselves, that Man's real purpose was a self-determined but cooperative struggle from finite unto infinite.

"You know," he told her, in the twilight of their lives, "ever since that distant journey of mine I have had a recurrent dream. I dreamed that I did not go back to the ship and elevate into space. I dreamed that I jumped under the bridge instead of into that shell-hole—that I had been injured and afflicted with amnesia, and that I remained on that world, thinking I was one of *them*.

"In that dream I became the ruler of their world, but I did not like the necessity of one man rule." At this point he smiled and shook his head. "You may think I'm insane, but I have often gathered the impression that that bridge and that shell-hole represented a dividing line between two alternate times. It was as though I jumped first under the bridge and lived that other life, and that my other self spoke to me over a bridge of future years unborn—to tell me the right way to jump!"

"That woman you dreamed you were married to—was she pretty?"

Bartuzán smiled at his wife, who was still beautiful in spite of her graying hair. "She was as mean and treacherous as a *Marzinian carlidu!*"

Alee's deep eyes looked far away. "I wonder if it was a dream, after all. Do you suppose she actually lives somewhere on that world today?"

Bartuzán did not answer. He looked out across the meadowlands and the sea. He was thinking of all the people in that world, who numbered perhaps billions. He had given them a chance. In a thousand years, perhaps, when they were finally rediscovered, they might be ready with the science and the industry and the strength to resist. Perhaps—if their own civilization could triumph over that inevitable contact—he would not, in the last analysis, have betrayed the Second Tirlanian Empire.

He might have been instrumental in giving it the gift of Eternity. . . .

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QUARTERBACK SNEAK

By J. P. Caravan

Being a further account of the adventures of John, his beautiful wife, and the old and evil professor.

ONCE upon a time at an old and famous university there lived and lurked a certain old and evil professor, who had been teaching various science classes for ninety-eight point six years. One day he was standing in his laboratory teaching his class in Biology 762 (Evolution and How to Ignore It), and everything had been going along normally: six students were asleep, two had fainted, three were dead, and one—whose name was John—was slowly being turned into an ape, or something very like an ape, and the rest were busily taking notes; when in rushed the football coach and the president and the whole bumbling board of trustees, blubbering and shouting, for they had just discovered that the old and evil professor had failed Quarterback Mike.

"Is it true?" they gasped. "Is it true that you flunked Quarterback Mike, who has been our star quarterback for the last seven years?"

The old and evil professor snarled fiendishly. "That's right. He registered for my famous course in Amino Acid Titration Curve Analysis and Theory of Absorption Spectra. That's the one where I fail everybody. In fact, I fail everybody in all my courses. It simplifies the paper work."

"But you can't fail Quarterback Mike," they chorused.

"Ha!"

"He's our best football player."

"Too late! Too late! He's already failed and that's all there is to it," and he kicked a sleeping student and tore up two masters' theses in his glee.

At this, the football coach and the president and the board of trustees began wailing and beating their heads against one of the walls, but it was a sturdy building, and did nothing more than tremble a bit.

"Silence!" said the old and evil professor. "I have an experiment going on." He gestured at the student named John, the one who was being turned into an ape, or something very like an ape. "Look. Watch. Isn't it beautiful to see what science can do?"

"Stap my vittles!" said John. "Rot me!"

And the evil old professor chuckled chillingly. "He's already back before 1700. Hear him?"

"Zounds!" said John. "Zooks!" His wife didn't let him swear, but he

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felt that this was a special occasion.

"Further back and further!" screeched the mad scientist.

"I beseche right humbly," said John. "Screche not. Mine ear like to braste. Alas, and weep for jjohn."

"Ungrammatical," murmured a student of linguistics who was passing by, "but it has a fourteenth century accent."

"In here!" yelled the professor, dragging him into the laboratory. "I need you." He shoved him to a seat near the window which looked out on the sea gnashing its teeth against the rocks far below. "He'll be going back faster and faster each minute. Back to the Roman era, back before that, back past Sanscrit and past the original first language, back past the pre-language stage to the common ancestor of ape and man. Back further and faster, back to a lemur-like creature, back to a smaller mammal, back to a fish and beyond. Faster! Faster! Millions of years! Back to a bit of primordal ooze! Ha! Back to nothing! And we will see it. Evolution in reverse!"

"I beg your pardon?" said the student of linguistics.

"John! John! This student here. I've given him an injection that will send him whirling backward along the line of his evolution. I want you to tell me what year he's reached. Where is he now? Where? Where?"

'Sic transeo mundo. Vae mihi! Lugete . . . quantum est hominum venustiorum! John Mortuus est."

"What's he saying? What? What?"

The student of linguistics smiled proudly. "That's classical Latin," he announced. "He says he's leaving the world. Woe is him. Mourn, all good people (or you could translate that: Mourn, what of more charming people there is) John is dead." He smiled ever more proudly. "Of course, I prefer the good Saint Berkley's exegesis of that difficult phrase: in the year 572 he discovered . . ."

"Silence!" screeched the old and evil professor. "None of your linguistic fibble-fabble here! This is a scientific laboratory!"

"Hey," said the trustees. "What we gonna do for a quarterback?"

"Is that really John?" asked the president of the old and famous university, for like everybody else except the professor, he liked John.

"Asti," said John sadly.

"He says it is," sullenly murmured the linguist. "Fibble-fabble indeed! Can you understand Sanscrit like that? You'll notice that the vowel A is used in place of both E and O. This proves . . ."

"Haven't I told you to be silent? Enough! Take a mass of unreal and undigested data and call it a science. Bah!"

"Where we gonna get a quarterback?"

"Linguistics is a science! It is! Philology! It is!"

"What we gonna do in the game tomorrow?"

"It is not!"

"It is!"

"You gotta get us a quarterback!"

"Silence!" and he began to howl, and a horrible howl it was, until

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everyone fell silent.

He looked at John, who was standing mournfully on a lab table, and the sight of his predicament restored his good humor, for he hated John more than he hated anybody else, which was going some. He hated John first because John was a nice guy, and he hated him second because John had gone and married his daughter, and he hated him worst of all because John and his daughter were happy. The old and evil professor hated to see people being happy, and he hated his daughter because she was beautiful: he hated all beautiful things. But now John was slowly being turned into a bit of prehistoric mud, and so the scientist was cheered up. "Does it hurt?" he asked hopefully.

"N," said John.

"Listen," shouted the student of linguistics. "Vocalic N: the ur-negatation. He's back to the basic language. **Beautiful!**"

"What **did he say?**" snarled the professor.

"I told you. He said no. He's as primitive as he can be and still talk. Wait till I do a paper on this!"

"He won't talk any more?"

"Not a bit! Look at that jaw. It isn't shaped for speech. He may make noises, but no reputable philologist would . . ."

"Then **I won't** need you," said the old and evil scholar, flinging the student of linguistics out the window. "Claim that nonsense to be a science," he shouted after him. "I wish I had time to dispose of you properly." And he stood in the window until the student had hit bottom and until the splash had subsided and the vultures flew down and pecked at the waves. "Science!" he said. "Ha!"

And now John's shoulders were slumping down and his brow was slanting back and hair was popping out all over his body, for as he went further back he moved faster and faster toward nothingness. His fingers grew thick and gnarled, and great muscles sprang out on his chest and arms and legs.

"Cave man," said the professor.

"You gotta get us a quarterback," said the trustees. "Quit fooling around."

And the professor smiled. "This is no fooling around," he said. "This is for keeps. John here is doomed. Look! Look!"

And now the football coach picked up a hypodermic syringe which was lying on the professor's desk. "What's this?" he asked.

"That!" said the old scholar. "That's the antidote. It stops the process. I might want to keep him a fish for a while and let him swim around with the frogs and electric eels in the specimen tank. Put it down."

But with a sudden lunge, the coach jabbed the needle into John's mighty right arm and plunged the antidote into his vein. "Sirs," he said, turning to the trustees, "Our problem is solved. John here is the perfect quarterback."

"Huh?" said the trustees.

"Observe the strong arms and the

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thick skull. Observe those thick brow ridges and the flat nose. Look at the sharp teeth and those huge feet and hands. Notice the dull, stupid expression: no temperament there, no brains to scramble. This man is perfect."

"He's not a man," howled the old and evil professor. "He's not a man any more. He's a missing link, or something close to one. He's a Pithecanthropus Erectus. Why did you go and ruin my experiment?"

"Why did you go and ruin our quarterback?" The coach helped John down from the laboratory table. "Come on," he said. "We've got to teach you to play football."

"Ug," said John, shambling out of the room behind the coach.

And the professor was so angry he tore a cyclotron apart and ate it.

IN the first ten minutes of the big game John made six touchdowns and broke two legs for people who tried to tackle him. He couldn't run at all, but the only way to stop him was to trick him into stepping out of bounds. This wasn't hard, because John wasn't quite as smart as a gorilla, though he looked something like one.

He was no good at all on the defense, but whenever one of the other team made a touchdown, John would pick him up and fling him into the stands, growling and showing his teeth. The other team soon stopped making touchdowns.

At the half the score was ninety-eight point six to twelve, and the cheer leaders of the old and famous university were leading wild cheers for John, for no quarterback had ever played such a powerful game before. Even the old and evil professor was happy, because the coach and trustees had promised to give John back to him after the game so he could go on with the experiment. There was only one unhappy face in the whole vast stadium, and it belonged to John's wife, who sat on the chilly concrete and wept. She could tell that John was so stupid that he cared only for football.

There was nothing she could do.

Nothing.

She watched miserably as the game drew toward its end and as the score mounted. She watched as John made another touchdown and she watched as the opposing coach rushed out on the field and began to shout to the referee. John stood by silently, waiting for the ball again.

"Look at him," shouted the opposing coach. "Look at him. He's an ape. I just noticed. He ain't human. That's cheating."

"Ug," said John.

"He's not an ape," said Coach Capulet. "He's a Pithecanthropus Erectus."

"Well, he ain't human."

"So what?" said Capulet.

"So he can't play."

"Where does it say in the rules that the players have to be human?"

The opposing coach began to jump up and down. "He gotta be a registered student. He gotta pass his courses. You can't tell me this thing

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here passes courses."

And the old and evil professor rushed out on the field, looking like a snarling snapping turtle that had forgotten its shell. "Until yesterday," he snarled, "this thing was a genius. It's a fully registered and matriculated student in the department of science," and he started to make a speech proving that linguistics, psychology, economics, and sociology were not sciences but merely a mass of superstition and bad dreams. He may have been right, but they pushed him off the field.

Saying "Ug," John scratched his head.

"Look," cried the opposing coach. "It ain't wearing no helmet. All players got to wear a helmet. It's in the sanity clause."

And when John's wife heard the opposing coach insist that John wear a helmet, she straightened up and stopped weeping, and she began to think. She thought so hard that two birds flying over the stadium fell bango! right out of the sky. She thought so hard that the sun was eclipsed and the cleated scrubs did squeak and gibber in the locker room. She thought so hard (and she was a genius) that she figured out what was going to happen and what to do about it.

She rushed from the stadium and bought a raw and bloody side of beef from the nearest butcher, and then she rushed back.

She was quick about it, so they were still arguing when she returned.

"All right," cried Coach Capulet. "I'll get him a helmet."

He tore a helmet from a substitute center and jammed it down on John's head. It fell off.

"Push it down on his forehead," said the referee.

"He has no forehead," said the coach.

"Then make some arrangement for a chin-strap."

"He has no chin."

"Ug," said John.

"Then if he can't wear a helmet, he can't play, and all the points he scored won't count." And the referee strode off to award the game to the opposing team.

"Wait," cried the president of the old and famous university, "I have an idea," and John's wife hugged the side of beef, for it was all happening as she had foreseen.

"Why don't we get the professor to bring him up a little nearer the human? Not too much, of course, but a few million years: enough to give him some sort of chin. Can you do that?"

"Of course I can do that," snarled the old and evil scientist. "I can do anything. But we have to be sure to stop him in plenty of time to keep him stupid enough to play football. If he should become human again it might be hard to convince him to go on with the experiment."

"Naturally," agreed the president. "Give him a shot to start him back toward the human state, but stand by with that other serum to stop the process. After the game you can turn him into an eagle, for all I care."

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"Don't be foolish. What would I want with an eagle? I hate birds."

"You hate everything."

"Not everything. Buzzards and vultures aren't so bad." He took out a huge hypodermic and jabbed John, who said "Ug."

"We'll stop him around the eolithic period. Don't worry about his getting away: he's so stupid that football is all he cares for. There's nothing that could make him leave the stadium before the game ends."

"Ray!" screamed the cheerleaders. "John! John! John!" and the stands screamed back, dancing and howling and cheering and not getting their homework done.

Suddenly John's wife darted out and onto the playing field and she rushed with the raw and bloody side of beef past John, and John, who hadn't eaten for two days, started shambling and lurching after her. Did you ever try to stop a thing weighing several hundred pounds who hadn't eaten for two days and who now saw a meal and started after it, saying "Ug"? Don't. He flung aside the old and evil professor and the coach and the whole board of trustees and even the cheerleaders and he staggered along after his wife and the side of beef.

She rushed from the stadium, and he rushed after her, picking up speed all the time as he changed toward something more human. By the time he reached the cave man stage, he wasn't running after the beef any more, but after his wife. Pretty soon all his muscles disappeared and he looked as human and scholarly as he had ever looked, and now he was running from the football game, and he got away.

So that was that. John and his wife went home and had roast beef for supper for seven weeks, and the trustees went off to buy some real gorillas to play football with specially designed helmets, and the old and evil professor got a pair of pliers and went around in a rage, pulling sophomores' teeth out until he felt better.

THE END

"Haven't you got any that just go bang?*"*

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SHE WAS SITTING IN THE DARK

By Richard Dorot

It was a stupid thing to risk the dangers of the Hot Belt—and Sam Baynes had only himself to blame when he was wrecked on Gorelle. But when he found the woman who had slept 10,000 years, he wondered if it wasn't worth it!

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Realization paralyzed him . . . she was *looking* at him! She was alive!

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A SHOCK wracked the little spaceboat, spun her end for end. The forested, hot swamps of the heat belt below swam madly across the fore-vision plates, followed by the horizon, the curdled sky—and suddenly Sam Baynes saw what had hit him. Sam's hands dropped from the madly jerking semi-circle of the control wheel. Extending below him like the highway to Hell was a vast tapering black opaqueness—the cone of a twister!

Twisters were far more fearful phenomena here over the hot belt of Gorelle than ever they were known to be on Earth. Terrible in their utterly irresistible strength, the stoutest space tugs had succumbed to their force. Of irregular occurrence, they cropped up frequently enough to make any crossing of the hot belt hazardous in the extreme. You just never knew . . . and now his number was up! His little boat was but a flea beside a space tug. Caught in the devouring maw of the windspout, Sam quit fighting the wheel and let nature take her course.

The whirling motion grew faster, and awesome was the scene racing across his view plates. Great trees a thousand feet in height lashed their branches; their ragged root masses grasped at the tiny craft with dripping black fibrous hands torn from the soft swampy beds far below by the awful clutch of the titan of the wind. Water, earth, branches, clods of grass, beasts, snakes; the mauled, red-streaming body of a gigantic crow-lizard; a red-skinned frog-warrior still clutching his blow-pipe and his death-axe, though the broken branch of a tree protruded through his smashed chest.

All these things and a million unclassified items tore past the vision plates in a mad circular dance.

Sam shut off the drive, and the mad dance quieted. The assorted howling bedlam of strange objects quit changing as he settled at once into his own place in the whirling mass of wind. Vibration ceased to shudder through the ship, but Sam's hairy brown hands still shook; he grasped his knees to stop their motion.

Strangely the end did not come. The whirl grew quieter, the noise of the terrific beast of force grew less, the ship seemed to drift away from the dark cone beneath. Somehow the monster had flung Sam contemptuously aside and roared away beneath toward more hardy prey.

Sam put his shaking hands back on the control wheel, brought the ship slowly under drive again, set her nose south toward the temperate zone. Never again for him! He'd cross the storm belt by hopping clear out of the atmosphere, even if it did take hours longer. The compass danced oddly. He watched it, expecting it to settle into place, but it didn't. It veered and jiggled, as he bent over it. It

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was saying he was headed due north again!

Sam let out a disgusted oath. Some of that flotsam in the cone had smashed in the side of his drive jet. He could only proceed in a circle. He shut off the drive, watching the still tossing tops of the giant trees under him rear closer. He had a choice of landing in that storm tossed forest, or of driving around up here in a circle until he'd have to make a landing without power, anyway. He switched on the belly jets, let her settle slowly down. The little ship gave a sigh as the first leaves whispered along her hull. Deeper—into a valley of green between the giant tree tops. Then branches were whipping all about him, their tips splintering, birds squawling off in bright clouds. Then a crash as the ship's weight brust a larger limb, caught, settled, crashed hard against an immovable trunk, came to rest upon a great hammock of torn limbs and stretching vines.

Sam got up slowly from the deck where the last shock had tossed him. His seat straps hadn't even been fastened, apparently. No wonder he'd got into trouble—his mind must have been on a picnic. . . . Well, there *had* been enough to make a man lose his mind, lately. Inside he felt a slow spring of relief well up. This accident at least gave him a chance to let up! No use now to hurry, he'd lost his chance at a good contract. Might as well take it easy, take his time repairing the damage, give himself a little rest before he got back into harness. That is, if he ever did win free of this titanic jungle.

Sam Baynes tilted the pilot's chair back on its gymbal, stretched out with a sigh of utter comfort. Right now he was going to take a nap. He'd had enough.

Overhead the soft leaves rustled, the sky peered through the leaves in chunks of unbelievable cobalt. The wind had torn the cloud wrack into patches, and the sun shone through upon the gently tossing forest roof, gold upon the green. Sam closed his eyes and sighed again. In minutes he was snoring.

The rustling of the leaves grew louder. A white monkey moved across the branches. Sam slept on. The white monkey peered in upon the sleeper, and chattered suddenly, excited to see Sam—inexplicable creature . . . like a monkey, perhaps.

SAM came out of his sleep with a start. For minutes he couldn't place his surroundings. Night had fallen, and an indescribable cacophony of unrelated sounds came and went beneath him in the darkness. Squawls and screams and honkings, suddenly falling into silence as some monster in the wet muck beneath roared out a hunger challenge. Minutes would tick by as the silence grew thicker with listening and then, little by little, the awful orchestra would tune up again, instrument by instrument,

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until the whole mad racket was going full blast.

Sam remembered where he was with a wry twist of the lips. Gingerly he shifted his weight in the oversoft acceleration padding of the seat, letting it right itself gradually until he was staring at the fore view-plate. Just as gingerly he reached out and touched the infra-red button, and the screen lit up with night vision. He sat watching the avenue of weird limbs twisting off out of sight in the beam of his bow light; the slow twining of a great snake looping along one limb, and above it a white night monkey cowering in silence, waiting for the giant snake to pass on its way; the swoop of pinions through that aisle again and again, too quickly gone for the eye to catch the shape; the drifting softness of many great moths; and bright orchids gaping their white mouths in clusters. Sam sighed in appreciation of the beauty and leaned back gingerly again to catch the rest of his sleep. He hoped the wind didn't start up and shake the ship from its perch. It was bad enough to think of facing the jungle below in the daytime, without being dropped into it in this black crawling night. Tomorrow he'd crawl out and take a look at the damage in the sunlight, maybe lash her fast to the limbs that upheld her. But not now, not now! He dropped off to sleep again.

Nearly asleep, he came out of it was a start that shook the precarious balance, the ship lurched, slipped, sagged a foot or two as he grabbed out with both hands. Then it stopped, swaying gently like a boat in a swell. And in his ears was still ringing that strange ululating, piercing, commanding call that had awakened him. No beast could command that volume, he'd swear. Nor give him that fierce prickling of fear over his whole body, like hairs raising out of his skin.

It was a long time before Sam closed his eyes again. Whatever made that cry, it was something unknown to Earthmen, something unbelievable! When he did close his eyes, it wasn't to sleep. He lay there, thinking, for hours, trying to get the fear out of him.

Morning, and Sam clambered gently out the air lock. He had a flame cutter strapped on his back, and a hammer. Also a roll of supralloy woven wire cable, to lash the boat if feasible. But his repair project died in his mind as he peered down at the sight beneath him.

Titanic architecture, a vast structure lay here under the ancient trees of this supposedly virgin jungle. From every cranny and carving of the time-stained stones sprang countless air-plants. Mosses trailed across the time-forgotten doorways, terraces, great arched windows and flying buttresses. Orchids flung their subtle sensuous colors from the ledges. Swamped

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under the growth, the titanic size and weight of the rocks of its construction had saved it from the roots that would have pried and levered a lesser structure into rubble.

Sam clambered back into his ship. Absently he set about constructing a ladder from the coil of wire. He spent the morning on the job, for he suspected he'd be using it for some time. Then, after eating a hasty lunch from cans, he clambered out again and carefully wrapped turn after turn of supralloy cable around the ship and the great trunk against which it leaned. If he was going to be here for weeks, he might as well be ready for the winds again. Time enough to think about getting away when he knew what that mighty ruin beneath really meant.

Gorelle must be lousy with relics, if it had a ruin like this one! The planet had no history! Who was the explorer responsible for that impression? Sam laughed. Some government duck holding down a sinecure with the least possible effort. He hadn't even been here, probably. Just accepted some half-baked prospector's word for it. Someone had looked over the plains country from the air and decided the whole planet was barren of remains of any kind of intelligent life. Then the survey job . . . Sam chortled. They'd flown over, making a quick photo map, sent in the prints, they'd been pieced together and filed away without going over it with a lens. A careful high magnification examination must inevitably have shown the remains left by a people able to build such gigantic edifices as this! Sam wondered just how many soft jobs there were in Government work, that such a thing could happen. Nobody bothered to do their job properly, and you had a planet as big as Gorelle, colonized, staked out and half of it already in the hands of speculators before anyone even found a ruin! Some heads would fall over *this* ruin, Sam hoped.

Lowering himself gingerly down the improvised wire ladder, Sam's head was busy with plans. This was his chance to make a killing, if he played all the angles just right! But if he slipped up, the gravy would go into someone else's lap.

With an effort, he put all such thinking out of his mind, and brought his attention to bear on the titanic edifice beneath him. As his feet finally touched the soft forest earth, he gasped in awed wonder. For now his eyes could devote their whole attention to the ruin. Most of the exterior was obscured by the mass of greenery it supported, but here and there a carved and shapely bit of stone shone through, proclaiming beauty. Dominating the whole side of the structure was the colossal doorway, kept partially free of plants by the paved terrace beneath, which yawned enigmatically at him

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with an invitation both exciting and ominous.

"Wonder why such a big door?" muttered Sam, plodding methodically forward through the tangled vines, his eyes trying not to mistake any snakes for vines, or any insects for leaves. In his hand he held an ancient GI .45, once his father's. He knew how to use it. In his pocket was a battery torch —he was really going over the inside of this thing. No telling what he might find—or miss if he didn't look carefully.

Straight into the darkness of the vast doorway he plodded, and stopped as from the walls he saw staring eerily the gleaming jewel eyes of statues that were never of human form, and yet of no other life he could put his finger on. Just nothing he had ever seen before . . . like . . . nothing he could put in words. Not exactly animal, even, their great eyes wide as their faces which were not faces but blank expanses of smooth stone where lips and nostrils should be. Tall necks, wide shoulders, long, long arms upraised to uphold the awful weight above, vaulting arms that faded into the shadowed architecture above without revealing human hands. Sam stood a long time looking at those statues, trying to place the familiar look about them, which was yet not "familiar" so much as "lovely" form.

Then he moved on, the alien time-dimmed splendor about him bemusing his mind, walking in a dream as he strove vainly to reconstruct some idea of what this place had been and what had lived here. Those statues could be stylized human forms, he supposed. They stood erect on two limbs, they had noble heads above strong shoulders, great chests and flat smooth bellies. . . . Still, he wasn't jumping to any conclusions. It looked to him like they had been distant cousins of the human race. Just as the Sequoias were distant cousins of other evergreen species . . . yet what a difference! This must be the same difference, too big to bridge with any flip summation.

Abruptly Sam shuddered violently, remembering the awful sound he had heard the night before from down in this direction. If that unearthly noise had come from the throat of a monster, and that monster something that had appropriated this huge doorway and passages beneath this ruin as the perfect burrow, he was putting his nose into a mess of trouble! With an effort Sam shook off the vivid recollection of that fearful sound and plodded on, his torch now needed as the gloom increased. Behind him the great doorway was but a patch of light and green shadows, and ahead the way curved down and down. There were openings in the walls at irregular intervals, and in each opening the smooth stone treads of stairways winding up out of sight. Some of these were choked with

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rubble fallen from above, decayed stuff of vegetable origin, so that Sam concluded the upper stories were overgrown with jungle stuff even inside, else how did that trash come to be here? Could it be from some flood, maybe long ago?

On down into total darkness the way wound, wide enough for a four lane highway, smooth enough for modern tires, and gloomy enough to suit a ghoul. Sam wrinkled his nose, trying to place the smell of the place. Was that a snake odor? Or just musty air? He shrugged it off as imagination, plodded on.

Abruptly the tunnel gave one final twist, and ended in a tremendous, vaulted, temple-like chamber. His torch was powerful and the batteries fresh, yet the beam would not reach the farther wall. There were only the gleaming colors of the strangely decorated floor, new and fresh as if laid yesterday, and the pillars rearing up in ranks, shaped with human curves and oddly familiar forms into that strange creature which could not be man . . . yet what else?

Sam plodded straight across the place, holding down a sensation of dread new to him. Then he stopped, his beam picking out a raised platform, a half-dozen steps up to a great throne-like chair. There were other smaller seats, and grouped benches, oddly shaped tables on which sat objects that could have been jugs and drinking vessels. But his eyes settled on none of these things, were gripped and held by the figure on the central chair.

STILL and motionless as death, she sat, and the awful time of waiting in that darkness that had gone by was like a weight on Sam's chest, just sensing how long—*how long*—it must have been! Sam's eyes rolled, trying to tear themselves away from the staring, glistening eyes of that white figure seated there, and not managing to do it. His torch beam held that face dead center, and he stood paralyzed by a realization. . . . But he could not accept the thought his mind was trying to grasp and understand. For the eyes moved, so slightly, centering on his torch.

When the light first struck her, those eyes had been staring over his head into the dark, motionless. Now they centered on him, and in spite of all his efforts, he was convinced the figure was looking at him! Sam spoke aloud in a desperate effort to reassert his sanity.

"No sense going loopy, Sam, settle down! It's only an old statue, some monument or such. Why get the jitters over nothing?"

Jerkily, Sam moved forward, mounting the steps at the side, meaning to go around the figure and see what lay behind. But his eyes would not leave that face, and the eyes followed him. The lovely head of the thing seemed to turn, slowly, always facing him.

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Then Sam suddenly let out a yelp of utter consternation. Even as his mind told him his light had activated a mechanism inside the figure, his judgment told him that here was something a lot more fantastic than any light-sensitive mechanical gadget to move a statue. For the white arm raised, gesturing in an odd welcoming motion, and the tall, graceful thing stood up effortlessly, lightly balanced as flesh itself!

It was an arm lovely as no sculpture ever managed to be lovely, yet Sam's mind assured him that arm was cold and lifeless as metal. It had to be! She couldn't be alive! She had been sitting here in the dark for untold centuries!

Then she spoke, sounds low and lovely and thrilling as no human voice had ever been. Sam stood with his mouth open, speechless and astounded and frozen with a fear that was like nothing he had ever felt inside him before. For a long moment he struggled with the overwhelming impulse to cut and run for it, then he mastered his unwilling limbs, held firm with the light on her lovely face. A human face, somehow, in spite of the alien size of her, in spite of the eerie absence of color in her skin, in spite of the strange things her eyes said.

An idea struck Sam's slowed, dazed mind, born of his first assumption of a light-sensitive mechanism activating a mechanical statue of some kind. He switched off the torch, stood in darkness, and his fear of that dark and the strangeness welled slowly up in him as he waited to see what the beautiful thing would do. As he flashed the light back on, he knew he had guessed wrong, for she still stood, facing him, her arm that had been raised still moving as she gestured with her hand something that meant nothing to him. If he had been right, she would have sat down again, assumed again the position in which he had found her.

Wide-eyed, wondering, shivering with an elation that was mixed with a powerful awed fear of her, Sam waited. She moved nearer, touched his body with one hand. The height of her was awe-inspiring alone, she was a foot or more above Sam's husky five-eleven. Her hand slid along his arm, touched the skin of his face, and she stepped back in surprise or alarm . . . Sam wasn't sure which. Just what she had expected him to feel like, he didn't know, but he was certain he was not what she had expected to touch. His mind was in a whirl as he tried desperately to rationalize her, fix her nature with some label acceptable to sanity, and failed. His own voice was a strange whisper of awe, echoing in the vast emptiness like the whisper of a scared ghost, as he asked, "What are you?"

The words made no impression, her hand came out again and explored his body curiously, and

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Sam's curiosity woke out of its daze. He reached out and touched her firm white arm with his fingers, sure that the touch would tell him she was a thing of cold metal. But his fingers touched a cool softness, and a shock of very evident sexual nature ran through him at the contact. She felt like flesh, and she felt like woman!

Then Sam Baynes did something he had never done before in his life. His head began to spin inside, his knees buckled oddly, a whirling blackness swept down and engulfed him. Quietly, with a little whimper of complete mystification, he fainted dead away.

WHEN Sam came to, she'd picked him up, was carrying him somewhere through the darkness. She didn't seem to need light . . or else she knew the way so well. He wondered which. Her arms made easy work of his weight, but they felt like arms of flesh and blood, and so did her breasts against his side.

"I can walk," said Baynes, ashamed, but she paid no attention. If there were only some way he could understand . . . or make her understand him. What was the answer? Was she something that had sat here for untold centuries, probably many thousands of years since this place had been abandoned and forgotten? Or what *was* she doing there, sitting in the darkness?

Sam didn't try to get free from her arms. There were several reasons: he was a little afraid of her strength—maybe he couldn't get free if he tried—but chiefly, he liked being held by her.

Then she laid him down, in the darkness still, and he could sense her bending over him. She lifted one of his closed eyelids and Sam realized he had closed his eyes in the dark, unconsciously. A little light flashed into the pupil. He tried to blink, but her fingers held the lid firmly.

Then the little light flashed out of nowhere, boring into the other eye. It twinkled, moved, twinkled, and quite abruptly Sam Baynes was sound asleep. He hadn't fainted. The light was hypnotic. He figured that out later . . . after he woke up.

When he did wake up, there was light around him. It came from round shields set in the walls. They glowed, and Sam didn't wonder what they were, particularly. He was too busy thinking, thinking in some new refreshing way. He knew something had been done to him, in that trance!

Then she came in, and spoke. He knew what she said, as if she was speaking English. "I hypnotized you, taught you my language and a few other things. Now we can converse."

Sam sat up. He rubbed his chin, surprised at the length of the stubble. "How long have I been out?" he asked, and she shook her head. "Try again," she said, smil-

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ing. Sam made a little effort and knew he was speaking another tongue. "How long have I been unconscious?"

"Three days. I had quite a lot of work to do, opening you up to my thought. Your race grows a hard brain. Stubborn!"

Sam partly understood. He rose, stretched. His legs were stiff! Working the kinks out, he asked, "How long have you been sitting out there on that throne chair? When I first saw you, I thought you were a mummy, something that had been there for thousands of years! I was scared."

"I know," she laughed, a gentle laugh, yet somehow not amused. "Silly, isn't it? I cannot tell you how long. I don't know myself."

"You've been waiting . . ." muttered Sam, and the words hung in the air and grew as he thought about them, grew heavy with the endless time.

She nodded. "Yes, I've been waiting."

Sam shook off the eerie sensation that insisted on creeping up his spine. "What were you waiting for? Here in this dark, deserted ruin? How did you get here? Where are you from?"

Sam sat down again, trying to find something to do with his hands. In his pockets he found cigarets, lit one. She watched him, her eyes curiously lighting up with a strong inner glow as if she had luminous works in her head. She didn't answer, and Sam muttered, half to himself: "She wants to converse, but she don't even tell me how she got here?"

The strange woman smiled placidly, said, "I was born here."

Sam stood up, shook his head. "I don't believe you. This place hasn't been lived in for centuries . . . maybe a lot longer than that. How could you have been born here?"

She looked at him with a baffled expression, as if wondering how you could tell such an ignoramus anything more complex than two times two. "You don't know? You honestly don't know?"

Sam grunted, exasperated. "No, I honestly don't know! How could you be born here in this ruin?"

She gave that little laugh, asked, "Where were you born? How long ago?" Her eyes told him that the answers to that should be the same answer he was asking for. Sam said, "Dammit, I wasn't born in an abandoned ruin on a planet supposedly never trod by human foot until Earthmen came. I was born on Earth, ten parsecs from Gorelle. That was exactly twenty-seven years ago, plus three months and eleven days. Does that tell you anything?"

She shook her head. "Very little. You are so young—how could you understand I was born here, as many of your years ago as you have days in your lifetime. How could I explain that to you?"

Sam sat down again, holding his cigarette with trembling fingers.

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He had to believe her. Something was too strange about her for his worldly skepticism to put aside. But how did it figure? Some people knew how to stay alive . . . knew . . . or *were* so different from everything he understood about life that they could sit for centuries, alone, in darkness thick as soot, just waiting for something to happen! That didn't sound like human life! It sounded like something so monstrously different it was frightening. For that matter, he was still scared! Plenty scared, and trying to reason his way out of the fear that lay in his guts like an icy snake.

Sam, doing the sum in his head, muttered, "That's somewhere around ten thousand years ago! I can't accept the idea you've been living for ten thousand years, not the way I've been taught. My mother always said, 'Sam, never believe a liar, no matter how pretty she is.' And you're a lot more than pretty. You're beautiful."

Abruptly she laughed, in a way very different from before. "Ah, now I understand! Your people never developed the *sleep!* They do not know how to rest! How long do they live, then, without it?"

Sam eyed her, digesting this. "The *sleep,* eh? I wonder. . . . We live from eighty to a hundred and twenty years, and it takes a mighty big lot of high priced medical care to live that long. People who never amass a lot of money never live more than seventy to eighty years, except occasionally. Now for once, answer just one question in detail. What *is* this *sleep* you mention as if it explained everything? Why does it enable a person like you to sit here for ten thousand years in the dark, quite contented and apparently no older than I?"

She was chuckling, a long-drawn indulgence of something that to her was very rare in the way of humor. "How stupid of me! Not to realize your people did not have *the sleep!* Of course you couldn't understand me being here. Well, so! I will tell you everything, now that I know what it is you do not know. Come; it is better that I show you as I explain."

She arose, turned away, moving gracefully as a deer and nearly as quickly. Sam jumped up and hurried after her, calling, "Wait, Mona Lisa, I'm not made of quicksilver, if you are!"

She paused, in the wide doorway opposite the one they had entered by, murmured, "I forget you are so different. It is only a step. Here . . . in this room, is my silver cradle. I was born here . . . and I sleep here, often."

"The *sleep*" was very large, and in the center of the chamber. It was large and too black to distinguish outlines, but it was a bed. It looked very soft and inviting. In its center was a depression, and Sam knew that had been caused by his still nameless sleeping beauty.

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He wondered if she had really lain on that huge black softness for ten thousand years? Or just the nights? Then he saw the web of tiny lights that twinkled over it, gently rising and falling in a continual dance of mysterious attractiveness. Sam made a guess as to what the web of lights were. But she touched some control near the huge bed, and the lights moved more swiftly, lowering until they hung but a foot above the soft surface. Another beam of darkness came on from overhead, pouring a tangible flood of dark energy down upon the bed. She explained in a drone of rapid speech that Sam had a hard time following, though she had certainly done a perfect job of giving him her tongue.

"The fabric of the couch is energized with a certain absorptive selective flow of . . . what you call magnetic force. It draws out of the body all the fatigue poisons.

"There are many of these poisons, more than you think. Some of them are taken in from the air, some from the water, some from the food. Some are given off by the cells of the body as a waste product. All of these are adsorbed, changed into other things, dissolved and drawn off by this force. It is a very wonderful development of a science of which your race knows almost nothing. The lights are detectors, they move in their own orbits, they detect and attune to the poisonous compounds in the body, and their attunement affects the quality of the energy flowing about the bed. It is really a complex magnetic device, and I suppose your education has not fitted you to understand its nature. However, the best way for you to comprehend it would be for you to use it. It would do you a great deal of good."

Sam shook his head slightly, an aversion to allowing any such alien fantastic thing to put him to sleep, subtract part of him, change him. . . . He wondered if he would even be human when it got through with him! As if reading his thought, she laughed. "You *are* a child, to fear a thing as beneficial as *the sleep*. Lie down, now, and trust me. How can I explain how I came to be here unless you let me show you?"

Sam made a visible effort to rationalize and dismiss the strangeness of this place and this woman who claimed ten thousand years. With a grimace, he scrambled upon the big bed and lay down. Inadvertently he yelled, "Hey! What is this . . . ?" as the lights swirled dizzyingly. Then he found his mind plunging down and down into a black pool.

"NOW I have you!" The woman's voice was very changed, not impatient and not strange to him, but very familiar, someone very close to him. "I have you in the dream state, and our minds are open to each other. I

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can show you how it all was. It is a story of strange peoples and forces, all unknown to you or to your race, and most of it in the past before your race even dreamed of reaching space."

Sam had nothing to say, felt only receptive, like a thirsty plant sensing the first drops of rain. It was very pleasant, and he could see just what she meant him to see, many beautiful people, her family and her lovers, her life in the far past. And that was all very natural, like watching a tri-di film, with lovely new side effects of pleasant sensation thrown in. He did not know even that he was asleep. Anything she suggested, he immediately was. She gestured with her hand, and he grew a foot taller, wider, stronger. He recognized his own face, saw it take on new beauty, a forcefulness and vigor greater than his own.

He heard himself saying, "Anor, you must come with me! I can't endure life on Werwud without you. It is torment, endless torment."

She called him by a name not familiar, and he accepted the name as his own. It was quite natural for him to be not himself but another man of another time and another world.

Anor came into his arms, gladly, giving and taking ecstasy in the Tral kiss of betrothal. But her words put him off: "I will, oh I will, my beloved. But there is Alfdar. If he knew I was about to marry another, there is no telling what he might do!"

Sam heard himself snorting sudden scorn. "Alfdar! That crazy sorcerer! Do you fear him, Anor? In the name of Quorn, why? What could he do? And why should he feel that you are his?"

"That is the difficulty. He contrived, by drugs or sorcery (Sam gathered that sorcery meant hypnotism plus certain other sciences, in a combination that meant getting people to do what you wanted), to make my father give his consent to my betrothal to Alfdar. My father thinks his word was given in good faith, will hold me to it."

Quite abruptly, in his dream, Anor threw herself into his arms, weeping. "Oh, Peergan, the man is so powerful, we will never escape him."

Peergan stroked her hair, kissed her again and again, and his voice was reassuring, though Sam knew the man (himself, apparently) was at a loss how to deal with anyone as rich and powerful as Alfdar. Peergan, among other things, promised to make a trip to Alfdar's forbidden island, try to deal with him before he knew there was anything amiss.

This promise seemed to horrify her. She stepped back with her hands clasped, supplicating: "No, oh no! Only by the use of your command could you overcome the defenses of Alfdar's island. And

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that risk is loss of honor, as well as life. Oh no! Not that."

Peergan stood there, his weight shifting from one big foot to the other. He had a wide, square face and powerful shoulders, and now the chin set in a stubborn look of immovable will. His uniform cap was clenched in his hand, and he looked down at it, thinking of his command. He was a captain of Robo infantry. His uniform, that cap insignia, symbolized an ancient pride. It took a capable engineer to keep fifty complex fighting machines in top shape, ready for action. And it took a good tactician to know how to use them in warfare. Peergan was saying, "It does not matter the risk—I would lose you anyway. But I *can* fix Alfdar's little steam chariot. That I am going to do. If I get away with it, I will come back. If not, at least you can wed whom you please."

Again she rushed into his arms, crying, "No, dear one. I will not marry some other, only you. Wait, and we will figure some other way."

Peergan shook his head, put on his cap, heel and toed it stiffly toward the door while Anor vainly tried to hold him back.

SAM, in the body of the stalwart Peergan, went along. The fifty robots were ordered into a submersible craft. It was in darkness, and Sam gathered that no one knew of this use of government property to settle a private grudge.

Peergan was full of a raging tension, a tiger holding himself on a thin leash of control. His robots were fearful things, twelve feet tall, and must have weighed upward of a ton apiece. The submersible came up out of the water in total darkness and crawled up the beach on some kind of caterpillar track-laying apparatus, noiseless as rubber. They all piled out, there on the white sands, and the ship slid silently back into the water.

They marched along the beach, then into the forest, along a path, up to a high wall. The robots went along the wall until a gate appeared, and then they smashed the gate, crushing the one sentry in arms that left only a broken heap of shapeless flesh.

Inside, the grounds of the place stretched in lovely natural beauty, lit dimly by the stars and a faint glow from the pile of masonry looming beyond the gardens. There were many windows, all brightly lit. The place itself was a palace, blackness bulking huge in the darkness, with the windows glowing gold in endless repetition.

Leaving tracks eight inches deep in the soft earth, the metal men moved toward the house. But Peergan stopped them, made an adjustment in the several tiny switches concealed behind a back panel. His thought as he did this was frightening. Sam himself realized that no man would ever control these

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robots again. They would have to be destroyed. They were set for "Total Destruction," a measure used only in desperate emergency, when all hope of life was gone for those who controlled them. They would go on, now, destroying and killing all who came before them, until they were themselves destroyed or broken.

Then as they moved onward toward that pile, Peergan went back to the beach, the submersible moved up again out of the water, and he entered. The ship sank again, and lay there, waiting. Peergan sat stiffly, watching the scene about the distant palace of Alfdar with moody eyes.

The metal men smashed into the walls of the house, ripping great holes of entry, battering, crushing. Servants ran screaming, only to fall into the crushing embrace of another coming from the other side. Other robots, Alfdar's own defensive equipment, moved up from the cellars, and they met the invading metal men with mighty clashings, shooting out destroying bolts of artificial lightning that burnt out the inner activating mechanisms of the robots, and were themselves destroyed by similar bolts.

The strange battle of giants went on in the night, and one by one the golden windows of Alfdar's palace went back to darkness, one by one the tall graceful towers toppled as the warring robots smashed away the underpinning. And Peergan watched, and waited. And at the last, a little flame shot up into the sky from that wrecked island palace. Peergan reached out to the controls of his ship, and it shot up out of the water in pursuit.

Alfdar was fleeing the death come to his island, and Peergan was going to make sure he did not escape that death. But that ship of Alfdar's was not ordinary. The heavy all-purpose army ship of Peergan could not overtake it, could not even keep it in sight. And as Peergan's ship fell behind, Sam found he was now seeing through the eyes of Anor.

She was in her own bedchamber, awaiting the return of Peergan, or news of his escapade. A slight sound of humming at the window caused her to turn, looking curiously. Then her scream rang out. She was watching a muscular form in black vault through the tall sash, and outside loomed the gleaming side of a craft, the round door of it level with her window. One scream she gave, then Alfdar had her, was carrying her back into the ship.

THE pictures faded, and Sam opened his eyes to his find, the woman who sat in the dark abandoned caverns beneath a ruin long forgotten, on a planet known to mankind for a few short years. She smiled, murmured, "I will have to tell you the rest myself, as it takes place here. Alfdar brought

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me here, to this wild planet, a place he had built years before as a hideaway that no one would ever find. He was right, no one of our world ever did find Gorelle.

"B—but" stammered Sam, "I thought that was thousands of years ago."

"It was," she nodded, her eyes somehow amused, and sad, and expectant of what he could not fathom. "It was a very long time ago. Alfdar knew his deeds would find him out, and decided to use the sleep device to put time between him and his enemies. That is why he brought me along, into the ultimate hiding place of all, the future."

Sam rolled off the bed, stood up, his face flushing with excitement and apprehension. "He's here, too? Here in this ruin?"

Anor nodded, rose to her feet. "I'll show you. He still sleeps, though sometimes he wakes. He is waiting, like myself, for life to come to Gorelle, I guess. For long ago our ship succumbed to the decay of time, and only the sleep devices that we awake and care for still survive of all our ancient tools. Some robots, some few things we have retained. But we cannot get off Gorelle, so since there is no use waking and living out our lives, we wait."

Sam nearly understood, now. Still, it was odd they had been unable to keep their means of getting away from the wild world, and yet could keep other things of metal. Anor understood his doubt, shook her head. "Our craft contained batteries, chemical purifiers, many things that will not survive a long time. The shell alone remains; the vital forces caged in its drive are gone."

She went on, "If we wake him, it may mean agonies of torment for both of us. For me, many lifetimes of pain and enslavement. For you, perhaps a quicker death. But you must kill him if you can get to him."

"Why not just go away and leave him?" Sam was skeptical. It wasn't exactly a pleasant job to think of doing, waking up a man who had slept for thousands of years, then killing him before he knew enough to defend himself.

"Come, I will show you why not." Sam followed Anor's subtly swaying hips, and in spite of his will the blood mounted through him in waves of increasing desire. This woman was distinctly woman. But when she drew aside, and waved a palm toward the scene ahead Sam forgot about her figure.

Across a doorway a curtain of vibrant blue rays turned the interior into a painting in blue tones. "Don't touch the curtain of rays. They destroy anything that passes beneath. They are far more protection than any metal could be. See, against the far wall . . ."

Another of the dark huge sleep couches against the walls, and the shimmering pattern of moving tiny lights making a web of mystery

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above it. But on the couch was a dark-skinned giant, mother-naked, sprawled in what Sam now accepted as an everlasting sleep.

"I hope to make his sleep everlasting . . ." murmured Anor, and Sam realized suddenly that she could pick up his thoughts when she wanted to, right out of his mind. Then he knew how she had learned his language so quickly. But how had she given him hers?

"Modest," murmured Sam, estimating the size and strength of the giant on the couch. "A modest bruiser. What do you want me to do? I could put a bullet in him from here . . . but would the screen destroy the bullet?"

Flanking the couch stood two metal figures, not human. They were blocky, massive of body. They stood on slender metal legs, and Sam wondered what kept them upright, what powers they might have if they were activated. He asked Anor: "Those are his robots?"

She nodded. "He has many others stored in other chambers. The doorway by which you entered was once covered by rocks and earth he had placed there by robots from outside. But they were removed during the years, I think, by a burrowing giant thing, a bellowing monster of the jungle."

"I heard it, the first night." murmured Sam.

"It still comes, sometimes. It sleeps in the tunnels. But it does not come down in the lower tunnels."

"I say let this man sleep, come away with me and forget this sleeping creature."

"Others of your race will come, now that the place is known. They will wake him, he will lie to them, get them to help him in his plans. He is a monster, a killer. He must not waken to do evil again."

Well, suppose you tell me what you want. I will do it."

WHATEVER she would have decided, Sam wasn't to learn.

Anor started back, let out a stifled scream. "His robots are moving! They've been left awake, to guard him. We've set them in motion by coming here."

Sam watched the heavy-bodied things, alarm sweeping through him, and never had he felt more helpless. He tugged out the gun at his side, triggered a shot at one of the metal things. The bullet struck the screen in front of him, it coruscated in a shower of sparks. Sam jumped back. A bit of molten lead had struck his face from that instantaneously shattered and consumed bullet.

The robot moved on, untouched. It pulled a lever in the wall, and the rays above the couch changed character, intensified, began to dance with prismatic effects. The naked figure on the couch stirred, lifted a hand to its head. Anor seized Sam's hand. "Come, run while we can! Maybe we can

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escape. I should not have ventured to bring you here. These robots can read thought, knew what we were discussing. I had not thought they could remain active after so long, still ready. One forgets . . . I have been a fool."

Together they were running through the darkness, with only Anor's hand on his to guide him.

Behind them the metallic thud of a robot's feet brought to Sam a sense of peril like nothing he had ever experienced. This Alfdar was a threat he had no slightest way of comparing with any known danger; no experience in his life had given him a knowledge of what to expect.

"In here!" breathed Anor, and swung shut a metal door and bolted it. She leaned against it a second, breathing hard, then seized Sam's hand and they ran on into the blackness. Again and again she bolted doors, and Sam had no idea where they were in the warrens under the ancient place when she caused the wall plates to glow. They warmed from dim moons to bright suns, in a row along the twelve-foot-high walls. Light as day now, they half blinded Sam from the brilliance, yet he could see they were in some ancient workshop or laboratory.

"We've **got** to fight. He knows now we meant to kill him. He will have no mercy, even on me."

Sam hefted his gun, sweaty in his hand. "I've only got this card to play, woman. You play your cards, I'll play mine. If he's holding aces, this is our finish."

A crash, the approaching thump, thump of the robot's heavy feet told them one of the doors they had bolted behind them had given way. Anor went into action, throwing open cabinet doors, tugging out several metallic spheres, touching them to an upright spiral of glowing wires. Sam watched the door they had bolted shut, figuring just where a bullet would hurt a metal robot about which one knew nothing . . . . and guessing the eyes would be most vulnerable, but knowing the builder would know that much and take precautions.

The spheres Anor was working with took life, floated above the floor, a little humming of power coming from them. Sam didn't ask questions, just watched her, hoping she knew enough to put the quietus on this gentleman from her past.

The door shuddered, boomed loudly as some weight crashed against it. Again, again, and it bent across the center, bulging inward; then the bolt bent out of shape and the door sagged open. Sam leveled the forty-five. It was a relic of his father. He had always meant to get one of the modern gas-pellet guns, but had never felt any real need. He knew how to use this, felt safe enough with it under ordinary circumstance. But right now he'd have given his right arm for the modern explosive pellets thrown by a gas gun. They

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might have had the punch to shake these robots loose from their wiring.

As the bulge-bodied thing charged through the door, Sam fired. The bullet spanged loudly against the thing's metal chest, caromed off to whine across the room, ricocheting again and again off the walls. It was more dangerous to themselves than to the robots for him to fire, Sam saw. But he tried it again, taking careful aim at one of the ruby eyes of the thing, and gave a grunt of exasperation as the slug cracked against the orb and failed to pierce it.

He shot a glance toward Anor as he backed quickly away from the now more slowly advancing robot, saw she was tossing the spheres toward the robot with a flushed, angry face, her teeth showing in a grimace of strain. The globes teetered in the air, turning slowly, then seemed to catch a scent or sight of the robot, swung toward it. The first one touched the metal of the robot as it was halfway across the big workshop and burst against its chest. For an instant the robot stood motionless, as if shocked or hurt, then took a tentative step which seemed to throw it off balance. It crashed to the floor. It lay there, its legs moving grotesquely in walking motions, but it did not get up. Sam gathered the spheres carried a charge of energy that upset the electro-magnetic balance of its metal brain. He wondered if the thing was out permanently or only for a short time.

The second robot advanced more cautiously, ducking and dodging as the slow moving spheres sought for him. It did avoid the spheres, came heavily clumping toward Sam. Sam tried another shot at close range, was gratified to see a dent appear in the thing's head. This metal wasn't impervious to a slug, then? That told him a lot about the science of this ancient race. But the dent did not impair the robot's movements. It reached for Sam, and he ducked under one of the arms, came up behind it, put a foot in its back and shoved. He felt the inertial drag of a gyro inside as the thing lurched, then righted itself. As it spun around, reaching for him again, Sam seized the arm, turned, levered the arm over his shoulder and bent over heaving up on the weight of the thing. It's easy to throw a man with that simple hold . . . but a man doesn't weigh a thousand pounds! He only succeeded in giving himself a strained back. The other arm of the robot grabbed the muscles of his left arm, squeezed, and Sam howled. He spun loose, leaped away on his toes, watching the thing warily, trying to figure its weakness. You can't throw a gyro off its balance . . . not when its housed in a thousand pound case. On one of the work benches lay a metal bar, a good yard long. Sam grabbed it, moved to the side

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of the robot, shoved it between the legs.

How he'd have made out with the massive strength of that thing if it ever really got hold of him, he wasn't to know, for one of Anor's spheres suddenly touched him in passing, and he felt a surge of energy rush into him from it. A numbing, paralyzing energy. He froze into motionles paralysis. The sphere shot away from him in a rebound crashed against the robot's arm, rolled along the arm, clanged to a stop against its head. The robot froze, teetered, hung there in an impossibly unbalanced position, held upright by the gyro inside.

Sam watched helplessly as Anor came up beside him with a coil of wire which she looped around the legs of the robot in many turns, twisting them tight with a bar. Then she turned to Sam, saw his plight, picked him up with a swift shoulder throw, ran across the shop to the farther door and through into darkness again.

"He wants us alive! Those robots could have killed us, they have rays built in which could have crisped us . . ." she panted, setting Sam down. Sam didn't answer. He couldn't even move his tongue. But he was thinking: "Now she tells me!"

She leaned Sam against the wall, propping him against a cabinet as the light shields in the walls slowly increased from dim glowing to bright radiance.

SAM was still standing there, helpless as a log of wood, when the door fell apart in a gouting fountain of molten metal. Through the white hot flowing ruins of the door stalked the powerful form of the man he had seen asleep, Alfdar. Anor had turned from her frenzied efforts to get some mechanism working, stood with her hands clenched in impotent fists as the man smiled grimly, raised a hand in a mocking salute of greeting. "No need to rush, now, Leila-Anor. I am here, and you are again my slave. So will it always be, now. But tell me, who is this would-be lover you must hold in stasis? Did he try to escape your caresses?"

Anor upended her graceful nose in disdain and contempt. Alfdar laughed at her expression, then ignored her as he examined Sam, item by item. "A man of the modern age?" he asked Anor, who did not answer him, but turned away her face. Stealthily her hands reached out to the apparatus beside her, turning here, twisting there, watching Alfdar with narrowed eyes. He turned away from Sam, strode toward her.

"Now, no more of this foolishness, dear woman. I have dared all, destroyed all, for you! I mean to have you, willing or unwilling. It will be much more convenient for both of us if you accept the inevitable gracefully."

As the man reached her, she smiled suddenly, her lovely lips

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over perfect teeth arching, her eyes softening. "Alfdar, would it be too disappointing if I agreed? Wouldn't you be lost for something to occupy you if I proved tractable? Perhaps that would be the way of vengeance, if I should decide to love you . . and you found me as empty and unexciting as any other woman!"

Alfdar looked surprised, but gallantly denied the implications. "Impossible, Anor the perfection of womanhood, prove disappointing! That I can never believe! Come, let me test this new attitude, before some other whim of perversity seizes you."

Hearing him, Sam felt a sudden doubt of Anor, an admiration for Alfdar rise in him. Had the woman misrepresented? Had she misjudged the man, and he had not really been responsible for the evil she blamed on him?

Anor opened her arms, her eyes knowing and seemingly suddenly enamoured of the man she professed to hate and despise. Alfdar moved into her embrace, crushed her to him, his lips seeking hers. Behind his back her hands moved swiftly over the device against which she leaned, pressed suddenly against some control.

At first there was no reaction, and Sam wondered if he had been imagining things. Then, from the curved surface of the massive device came a dim glow. As if stung by a hornet, Alfdar spun out of her grasp, his eyes fastening on the increasing glow of the machine beside him. His eyes went to Anor's horrified, his words were a shout of alarm. "You have turned the power in upon itself! The pack will self-ignite! Do you know what you've done?"

Anor nodded, and Alfdar bent swiftly over the mechanism, ripping away hot wires with smoking hands, kicking loose dial-studs with his feet, trying desperately to halt the progress of the inward blaze. Anor retreated swiftly, was by the door by which he had entered, when she shouted, "It's useless, Alfdar, and you know it. It will go up, and all of Hreim with it. Your work and your treasures, your robots and the loot of all the murdered citizens you collected here, all will vanish into dust when the pack fissions. You might save your life, if you follow me into the new time empty handed, powerless, poor as the day you were born."

And with a movement quick as a squirrel diving for its hole she was gone out the door. Sam could hear her feet racing, the sound dying away into silence. Sam looked at the hissing heat of the now read-hot mechanism, fear tugged at his helpless muscles, but only his tongue moved in his frozen jaws, and he moaned in a maniac sound of meaningless noise. Alfdar looked at him, and suddenly laughed. "She leaves you too, stranger, to face death with me. Come, we've got to get out of here. All women are faithless, consequently we men

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must hang together."

The tall powerful figure galvanized into swift action, leaped across the chamber of forgotten wizardry, swung Sam aloft with one powerful hand under an armpit, held him there on his shoulder as he reached out and through the brightly lit workshop through the dim hallway, through the dark passages, up and up toward daylight far above them.

SAM never knew just how many minutes elapsed before the explosion. He felt leaves brushing his face, it was night, the jungle symphony was going full blast all about—and behind them the night suddenly erupted with blinding flame and awful thunder. They were both thrown to the forest floor. Sam's limbs had regained some strength, and he broke his fall with his arms and knees. He lay there blinded and deafened as the air-blast rushed over them, tearing at them with unseen hands, ripping their clothes from their bodies, burning at their skin with strange, fiery caresses.

When it was over, and the glow behind them had softened, Sam heard the man beside him sit, groan aloud in anguish. "Gone, all gone, the work of a dozen lifetimes. There was only one task I failed to accomplish that I ever attempted."

Sam wondered, heard his own voice ask almost unconsciously: "What task was that, Alfdar?"

"Eh?" Alfdar put his face close to Sam's in the starlight, peering into his eyes curiously. "Oh, she has taught you our tongue? What task, eh? I had not realized you could understand. Why, to penetrate a woman's stubborn will to misunderstand every motive in a man—that task I found impossible. I can do many things, but one thing I can never do: make a woman change her mind once she sets it in some decision contrary to all reason."

"She misjudged you, Alfdar?" murmured Sam, his brain alive with questions, but afraid to nullify the man's shocked receptiveness now, in the numbed silence after that awful blast.

"Misjudged me? That is stating it mildly. I saved her life, gave her practically immortality, transported her through the medium of the renu-sleep device to this present time when everyone else on her world was doomed . . . and she blames me for the whole business! I did it, I killed her people, I destroyed her race, I annihilated a planet, I killed her precious Peergan, the numbskull, all for the mere pleasure of making a slave out of her when I had her in my power. She is gifted with that most revolting of all woman's precious gifts, intuitive perversity. She knows, without needing logic or reason or perception, she *knows* I'm a low, evil creature."

Sam grinned in the darkness. "I thought, when I met my first wife,

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I had found perfection, too. She ran off with a brush salesman. Maybe she isn't worth the effort, Alfdar. I changed my mind about Anor when she ran off and left me leaning against the wall beside that baby B-bomb she set going."

Alfdar looked at Sam in the dim gloom, and Sam could see the anger darkening his cheeks. Sam realized he'd said the wrong thing. He knew from experience you can't tell a man in love any more than you can tell to a woman. Hastily Sam interposed, before the man's reflexes got going: "Of course, she was under strain, and she just forgot I was there."

Alfdar relaxed, leaned back, rubbing his barked shins. His clothes were ripped nearly off his brawny figure, and blood streaked his skin in a score of places. Sam pointed a finger heavenward: "I've got a little cabin cruiser lashed to a limb overhead. That is, if the blast left it in one piece. If we climb up to it, there's medicine, first aid, bandages . . ."

Alfdar gloomily shook his head. "First, I've got to find that demented creature—I love her. To you, she is not worth the search, perhaps. To me, she is everything."

"She knows where the ship is," murmured Sam, not wanting to say the wrong thing, but hoping to suggest what principally worried him. "She will be climbing toward it, now. If she gets the lashings off before we reach her, she'll leave us here. She thinks us dead."

Alfdar heaved himself to his feet, groaning with pain from the movement, and growled: "That's the logical place to look for her at that."

As Sam groped through the gloom, feeling about the trunks of the great trees for the end of his wire ladder, a white figure rushed suddenly past him. He spun around, to see Anor throw herself into Alfdar's arms, weeping hysterically. He could just follow her almost unintelligible voice, as she sobbed out: "Darling, I heard you talking with the Earthman, and I understand, now. How could I have been so dense, so stupid? Can you ever forgive me?"

Alfdar's rumble came, a gentle growl like a bear to a cub. "You can't help being that way, being woman. I love you, and let's hear no more of my villainies. We have each other, and a new universe from which to carve a new life."

Sam cracked a palm to a burned cheek in mute supplication to the gods who had designed the amazing fabric of life. But his wonder at human nature lasted only long enough to lead him to speculation on the best way to start off the publicity campaign for marketing that sleep-renu thing. There was a mighty fortune in that. . . . If Alfdar would just co-operate, they could build an empire of dollars along with their new life.

Maybe it hadn't been such a bad idea to risk the Hot Belt at that!

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OPTICAL ILLUSION

MOLLY brought my plate, silver and side dishes and placed them before me without fuss or comment. I was an old customer and one of the things I liked about Molly was that she never fussed over me.

I usually make a practice of eating after the rush hour but today I was early and the restaurant crowded. It was only a matter of time before someone would want to share my table.

I didn't look up when he asked, "Is this seat taken?" His voice was high, almost to the point of shrillness in spite of his attempt to control it.

"No," I told him, "go right ahead."

He hung his cane, or umbrella, whatever it was, over the back of his chair and fumbled his hat underneath it before climbing to his seat. Then he picked up the menu from where it stood between the catsup and napkins.

"Nothing fit to eat," he muttered finally.

I said, "The pot pie is quite good today."

Molly came up and he said to her, "I'll have the swiss steak, Miss. Green peas, french fries. I'll decide on the dessert later."

"Coffee?"

"Milk."

I don't know what it was that first gave me the idea that the person seated across the table from me wasn't a midget at all. Not a midget or dwarf, but a child pretending adulthood and doing a fantastically good job of it. As I say, I don't know what it was that gave me the hint, possibly I'm more susceptible to such intuitiveness than the next man.

But whatever it was, he knew almost as soon as I did.

That is, he knew that I'd caught on to him and somehow it frightened me. The whole idea was so bizarre — a child, not yet in his teens, passing himself off for some reason of his own as a mature, if stunted, adult.

"So," he said, his shrill voice almost a hiss. He put down his fork. "So . . ."

How can I describe that cold voice? The voice of a child . . . but not a child. Not a child as we know one.

I reached for the sugar which was there where it always is at the end of the table next to the salt and pepper and the mustard jar. I measured out a spoonful very carefully without looking up at him. As I have said, somehow I was afraid.

He said, still softly, "So at last a stupid human has penetrated my disguise."

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By Mack Reynolds

If aliens from another world are among us, how would we detect them if their disguise is perfect? Well, perhaps some of us are not perfect humans, and therefore . . .

He said, softly: "So at last a human has penetrated my disguise!"

Illustrated by Michael Becker

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A *human*, he had said.

His voice was a child's but his words dug into me viciously. "Ah, so that surprises you, my curious friend. You wonder, eh?" There was a sneering quality now, a contemptuous overtone.

I cleared my throat, tried to cover my confusion by taking a gulp of the coffee. "I don't know what you mean . . . sir."

He chuckled and mimicked, "I don't know what you mean . . . sir." Then his voice snapped over at me, even as he kept his tone low. "Why did you hesitate before adding the *sir*, eh? Why?" He didn't wait for an answer. "I'll tell you why. Because somehow you've discovered that my age is less than I would have it known."

He was boiling with rage, and in spite of his size and the public nature of our whereabouts, I was afraid of him. Why, I didn't know. Somehow I sensed that — impossibly — he could destroy me at will.

I fumbled my cup back into its saucer, kept my face averted.

"You're terrified," he snapped again. "You recognize your master even as you wonder about him."

"My master?" I said. Who did he think . . .

"Your master," he repeated. "Mankind's master. The new race. The super race, *Homo Superior*, if you will. He is here, my snooping friend and you, you and your stupid nation-divided, race-divided, class-divided, religion-divided humanity will never stand before him."

It was hard for me to assimilate. I had come into my favorite restaurant for my mid-day meal. It had been a routine day and I had expected it to continue as one. Now, I had been startled so many times in the past few minutes that I felt I was in a state of shock.

"Oh, it's been suggested before," he went on, seemingly welcoming this opportunity to explain to me, to gloat over me. "The possibility that mutations would develop, a super-race, a super-humanity as far above man as man is above the ape."

"How . . . what . . ."

He cut me off. "What difference if it was the atomic bomb, laboratory experiments, or only nature's continual plodding advance? The fact remains, we are here, a considerable number of us and in a few years, when we have developed our full capacities, man will hear from us. Ah, how he will hear!"

Long ago an icy hand had gripped my heart. Now it squeezed.

"Why," I stumbled. "Why tell me all this? Surely you wouldn't disguise yourself if you didn't wish to keep it all a secret."

He laughed mockingly. There was still much of the immature in him, super-race or nay.

"Because it doesn't make any difference," he whispered. "None at all. Ten minutes from now, you will remember nothing of this conversation. Hypnotism, my stupid *homo*

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sapiens, can be a developed art when practiced on the lower orders."

His voice went hard and incisive. "Look up into my eyes," he ordered.

I had no power to resist. Slowly my face came up. I could *feel* his eyes drill into mine.

"This you will forget," he ordered. "All of this conversation, all of this experience, you will forget."

He came to his feet, took his time about securing his things, and then left.

Molly came over later. "Gee," she said, "that little midget that was just here, he sure tips good."

"I would imagine," I told her. I was still shaken. "He probably has a substantial source of income."

"Oh," Molly said, making conversation as she cleaned up. "You been talking to him?"

"Yes," I told her, "we had quite a discussion." I added thoughtfully, "and as a result I have duties to perform."

I came to my own feet and reached up for my hat and cane where they hung on their usual hook.

I thought: *possibly man has more of a chance than these hidden enemies realize. Mental powers beyond us they may have, although they would seem lacking in the more kindly qualities. But this one hadn't been as sharp as he liked to think himself. Hypnotic powers he might possess beyond our understanding, but that didn't prevent him from making a very foolish error. He hadn't caught on to the fact that I'm blind.*

THE END

CONTEST WINNER

The May, 1953, issue of OTHER WORLDS contained an illustration by Charles Hornstein, depicting a Thor-like character driving a pair of (we called them) gryphons. We asked our readers what the illustration brought to mind in the way of "story" inspiration. We got a large variety of ideas, and the one that struck us as most interesting was submitted by Mrs. Mildred V. Kennedy, 121 Mavety Street, Toronto 9, Ontario, Canada. Therefore, we are sending Mrs. Kennedy our check for $25.00 as winner of our little "contest." Congratulations Mrs. Kennedy.

We wonder, do more thunderstorms occur on Thursday than on any other day? First time we've ever considered that Thursday might be Thor's "off day"! His day of no control over his electrons . . .

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Walt Sheldon

THE TECHNICAL SWAIN – It would seem that a man with the nerve to go into space could find the courage to ask a girl to marry him. But there was a very technical reason why he couldn't – and a technical way he could You see, it was all in the book . . .

Ralph Sloan

THE TREASON OF JOE GATES – There was something about this vital meeting at the White House that smelled to high heaven – to the moon, in fact! And it developed there was treason in a harmless cup of coffee and a sandwich!

Edward Wellen

THE VOICES – When he was fifteen, he drove a pencil point into his palm and the bit of graphite remained embedded. When he was eighteen he lost a tooth and a new one was inserted, made of chromium-cobalt alloy. And so it went, until he was thirty. Then the voice spoke to him . . . and time slipped a cog.

Howth Castle & T. P. Caravan

STITCH IN TIME – Why not memorize all the horse races for a hundred years and go time travelling? You'd be rich, betting on them. But you can't change the past? If you had won, you'd remember it? Or history would? Confusing, isn't it?

Frank Patton

SURE THING – Yes, that's what it would be! A sure thing to con the suckers in the numbers game, if you knew a day in advance what the numbers would be. And the date on the newspaper was March 1, and that was tomorrow! A sure thing for a clean-up .

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